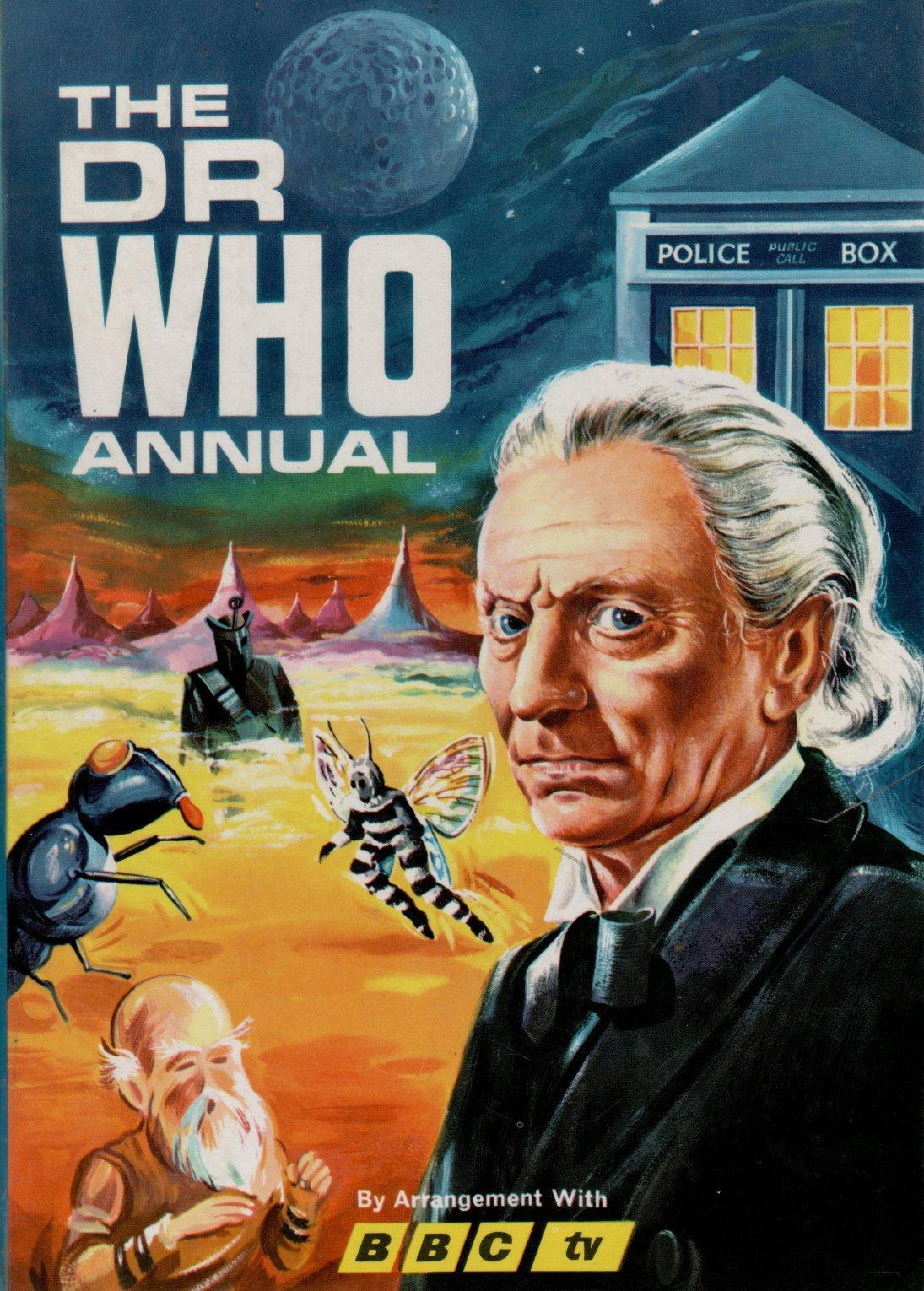
THE DR WHO ANNUAL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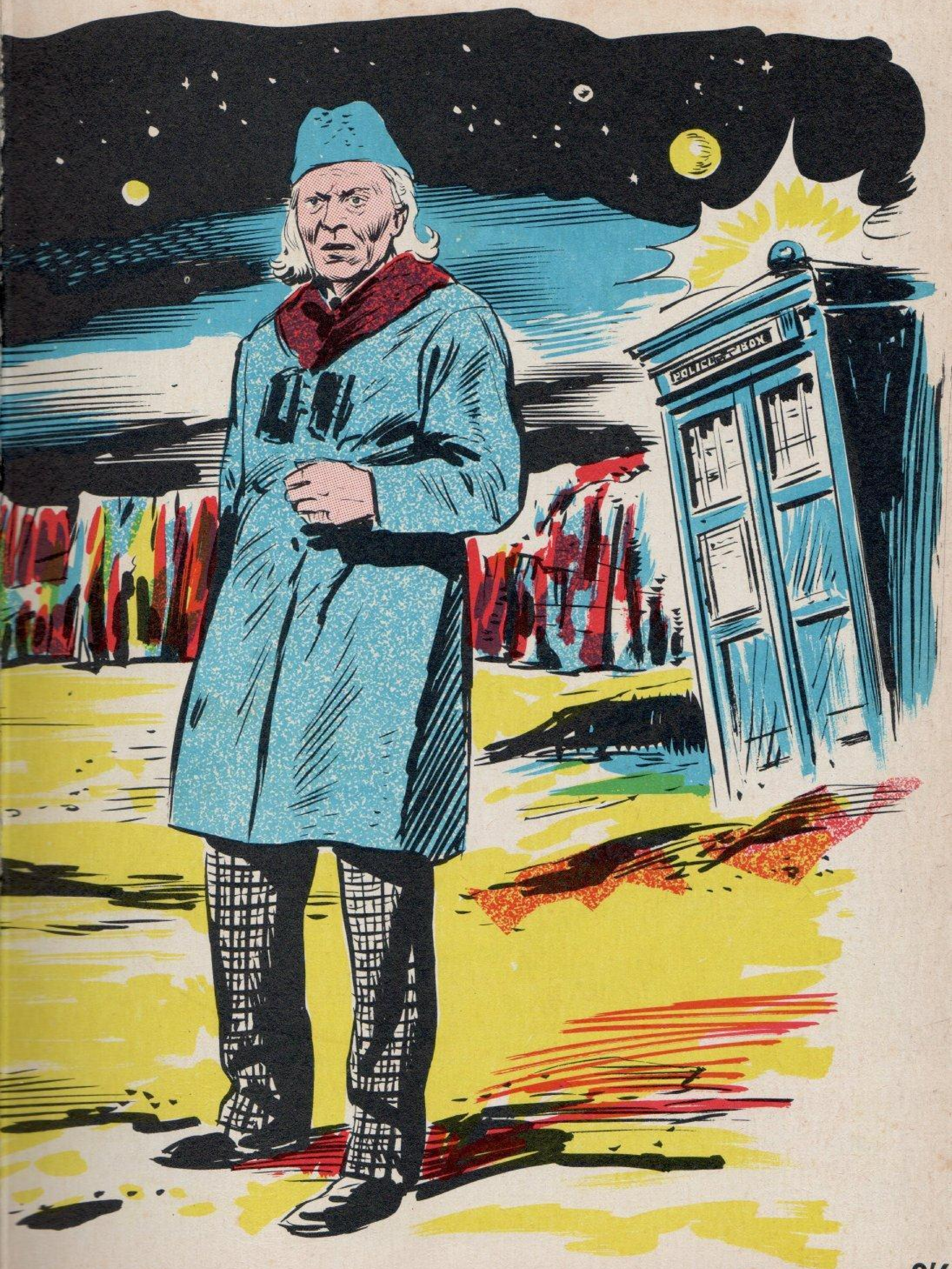

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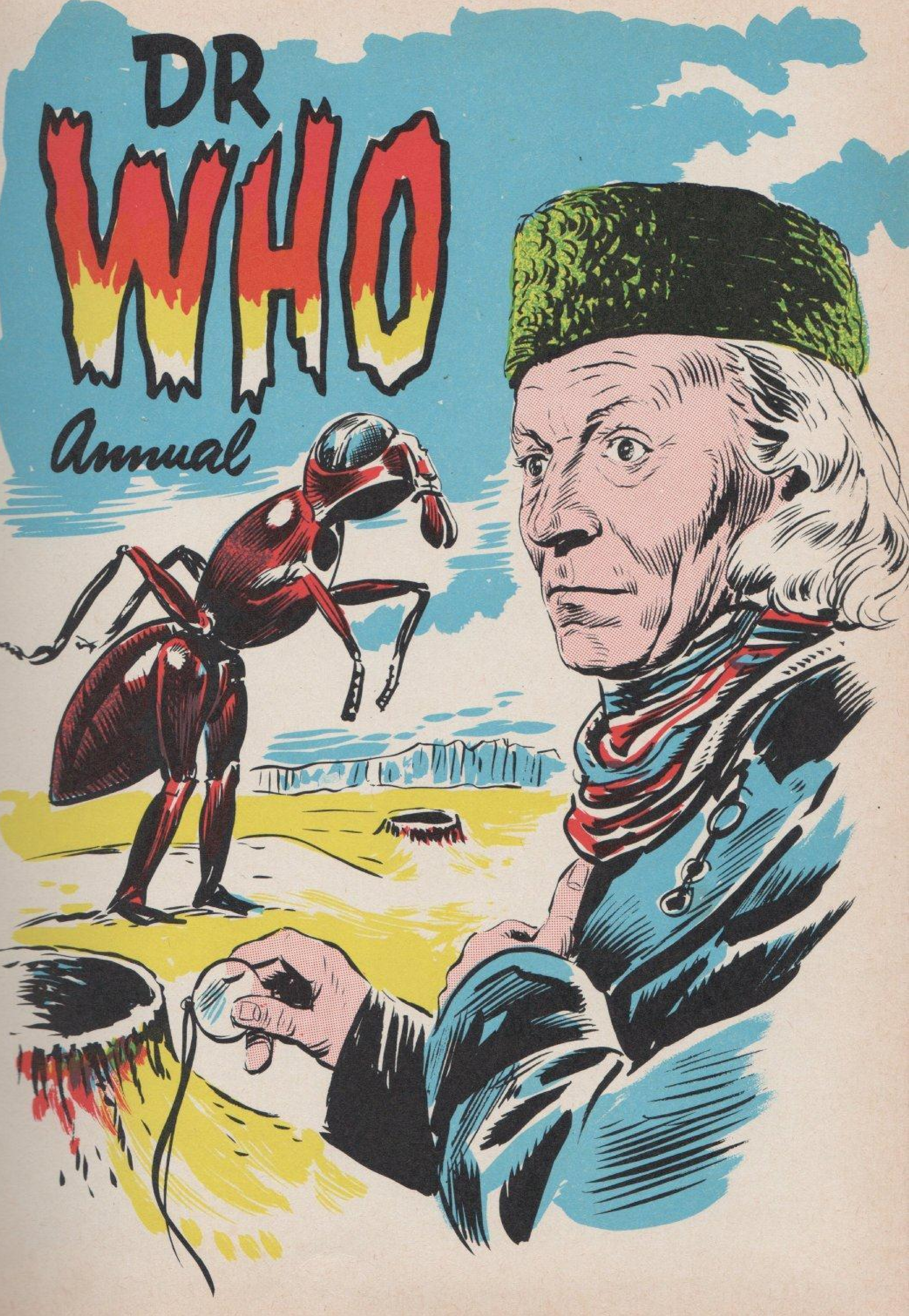
DR
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Annual

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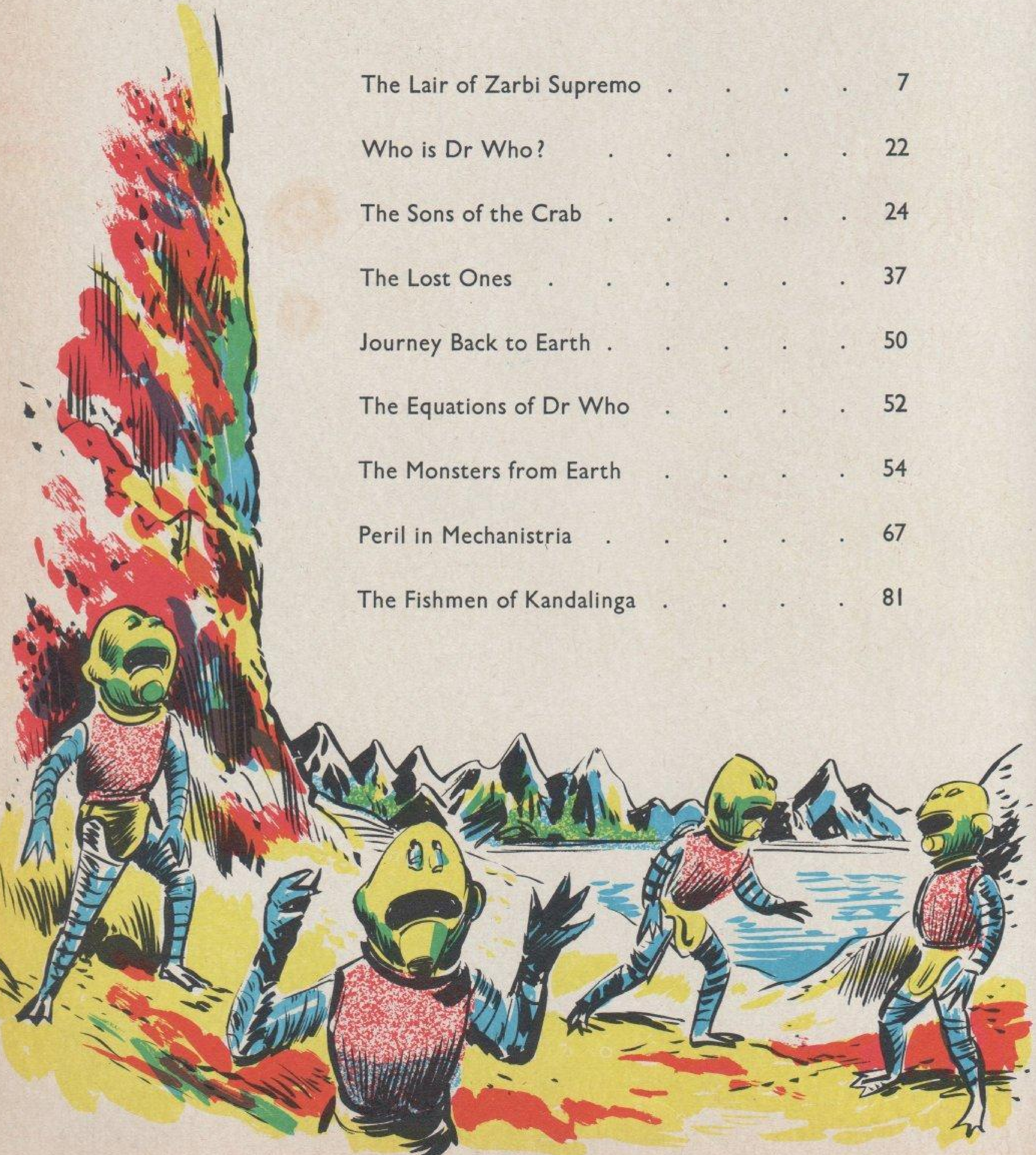
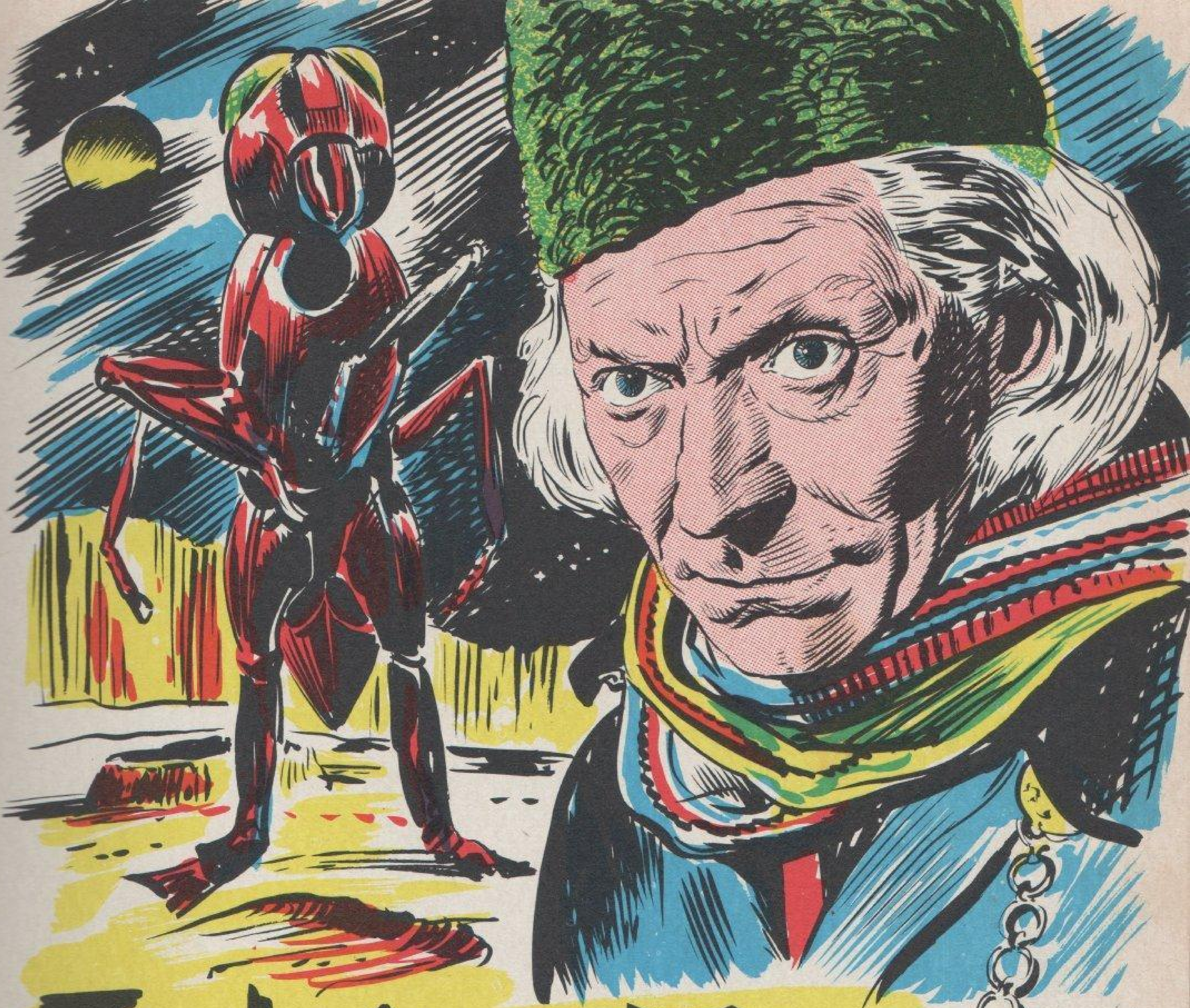




The Lair of ZARBI SUPREMO

THE shock of hearing the voice was so great that Dr Who had barely time to complete the materialisation processes. But old habit was strong, and smoothly and efficiently the *Tardis* slid in through the transdimensional flux and fitted its rearranged atoms into the new sphere. By all the doctor's co-ordinates and calculations this world should be the planet Vortis but just *where* on the planet, or *when* in the time-scale of that world, he could not as yet know. He drove home the last lever and, with hands on the edges of the control panel, panted with excitement. The voice through his radio had been talking in modern English!

He strapped the walkie-talkie apparatus on his shoulders, already clad in the Atmospheric Density Jacket he remembered having needed on his previous visit to this ill-omened world. Then, activating the great door, he stood waiting for it to open, fidgeting with impatience.

This was not at all like the Vortis he remembered, was his first thought as he peered out through the open portals. True, there were several moons in the sky, two of them so close to the planet that they could be seen in daylight. The sparkles he remembered were in the sky also, but the mists were not there, nor the white basaltic needle-like spires. Quite evidently, his *Tardis* had landed him in an entirely different part of the planet. He walked steadily through the doorway, the voice from the radio still murmuring in his ears.

He had first heard it during the materialisation of his ship from intra-dimensional non-space into the real space in which Vortis swam. The voice sounded low and weary and consisted of but few words. It was as though the effort to dredge the words out was almost too much for the throat uttering them. "Help, Help," the voice was muttering. "Beware Zarbi Supremo. Warn Earth. Warn Earth." That was all. It was so tantalisingly obscure that Dr Who was almost dancing with impatience as he set foot outside his ship. But what he saw when he looked round the landscape momentarily drove all else from his mind.

He was on a low plateau, overlooking a broad plain. At least it should have been a plain, for the ground itself seemed flat enough. It was the structures that reared themselves up from that plain that made the eyes almost start from his head. On every side and outwards as far as the horizon, there reared up from the ground a multitude of cone-like structures like dunces' caps, like sugar-loaves, like—and now he knew for certain that he was back on Vortis—just like ant-hills. He darted back inside his ship and re-emerged with binoculars.

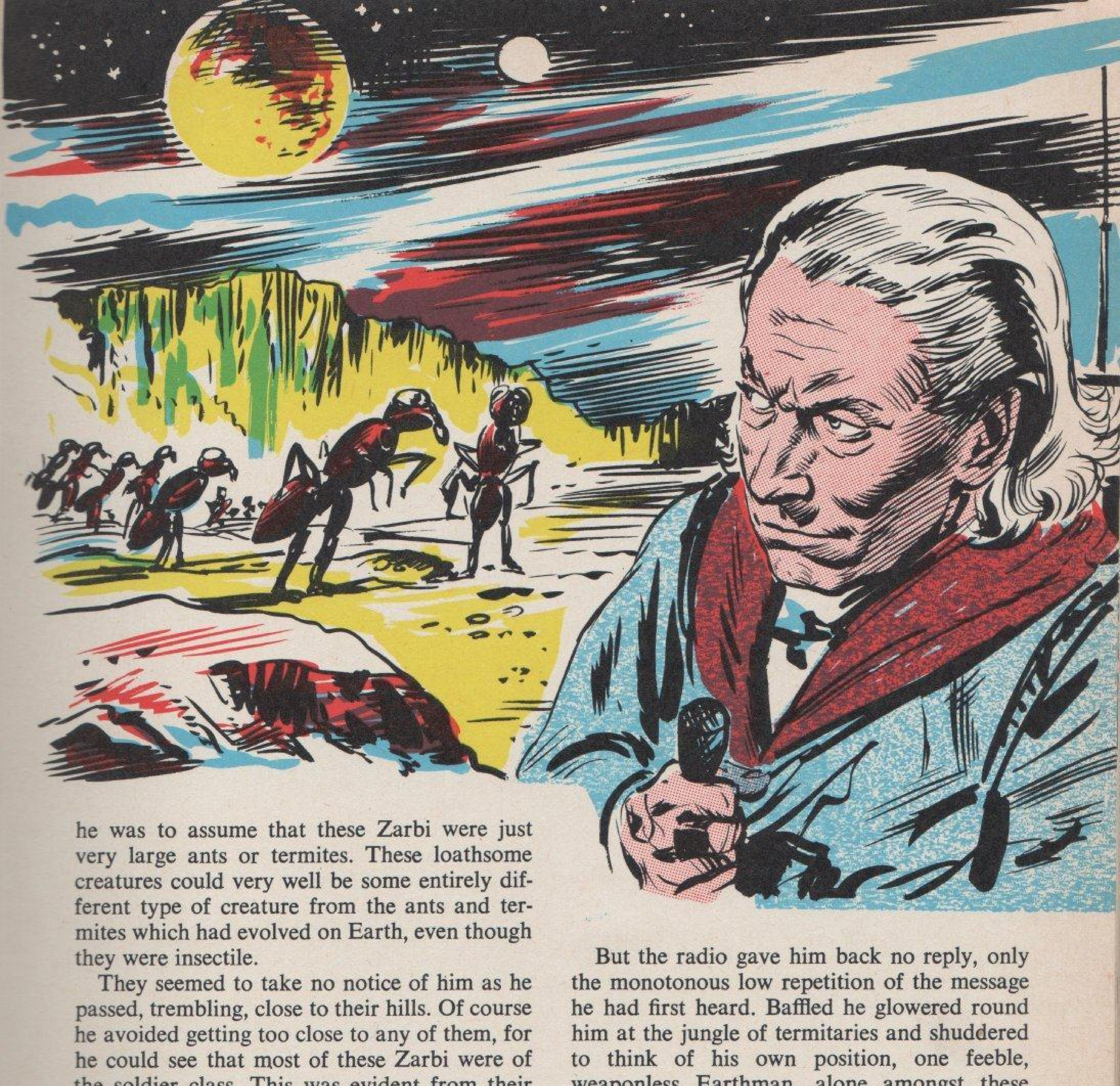
He trained the glasses on the cones nearest to him and his gaze roamed over the surface, confirming that his first deduction was only too true. These monstrous hills of maybe a hundred feet high were the counterparts of the anthills or termitaries to be seen in the Southern Hemisphere of Earth and . . . crawling all over them, in and out of their holes, were hordes of the hideous inhabitants of Vortis, the huge ants or termites known as the Zarbi.

Fascinated, he allowed the glasses to lead his gaze over first one immense hill and then another. There they crawled, hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of them. Those noxious mindless creatures, controlled from a distance by some unknown intelligence, who preyed upon the likeable innocent Butterfly people, the Menoptera, the other species native to Vortis, whom he had encountered on his last visit. He had seen but little of the Zarbi themselves then, but he had heard enough to know that they were to be dreaded.

"Help. Help. Beware Zarbi Supremo!" the voice in his earphone droned on. "Warn Earth. Warn Earth." He started as the voice again penetrated into his consciousness. Somewhere, not too far away from him, was a man of Earth. He seemed to be weak and was perhaps wounded or a prisoner—somewhere in that veritable maze of termitaries. The doctor stared sombrely at the forest of cones and lowered the glasses. On his walkie-talkie there was, of course, a directional aerial and he began to twist the knob, listening as the sound of the voice sank or grew louder.

At last he determined roughly the quarter where the sound originated. He turned his face in that direction. It looked no different from any other part of the plain of anthills; but somewhere out there must be the owner of that tired voice, that voice that cried out hopelessly on an alien planet for a rescue of which it had lost all hope. But Dr Who had made up his mind that rescue he would attempt, no matter where it led him or through what perils. That his first greeting on Vortis should be the sound of a human voice, speaking in his own native tongue, was so extraordinary a thing that the doctor knew that fate had directed his hands as they had locked home the controls which had precipitated the *Tardis* into the sphere of Vortis at this precise place and at this precise time.

As he approached the termitaries he was almost deafened by the shrill chirping of the millions of Zarbi as they crawled about their mysterious business. On Earth ants and termites have no real voices, they communicate by rubbing their back legs together. Dr Who reflected that he could very well be mightily in error if



he was to assume that these Zarbi were just very large ants or termites. These loathsome creatures could very well be some entirely different type of creature from the ants and termites which had evolved on Earth, even though they were insectile.

They seemed to take no notice of him as he passed, trembling, close to their hills. Of course he avoided getting too close to any of them, for he could see that most of these Zarbi were of the soldier class. This was evident from their powerful huge mandibles, which in a creature of that size could tear the limbs from a man, just as a man might tear apart a roasted chicken.

The voice over the radio was stronger now so that the doctor felt that he was getting very close to its source. Walking as warily as he could and avoiding contact with any of the Zarbi, he trod softly on the sandy surface of the ground, his gaze moving constantly about. Now he switched on his sender and spoke urgently into the microphone. "Help is here," he said. "Direct me to where you are. Give me some landmark to go by. I am coming to you."

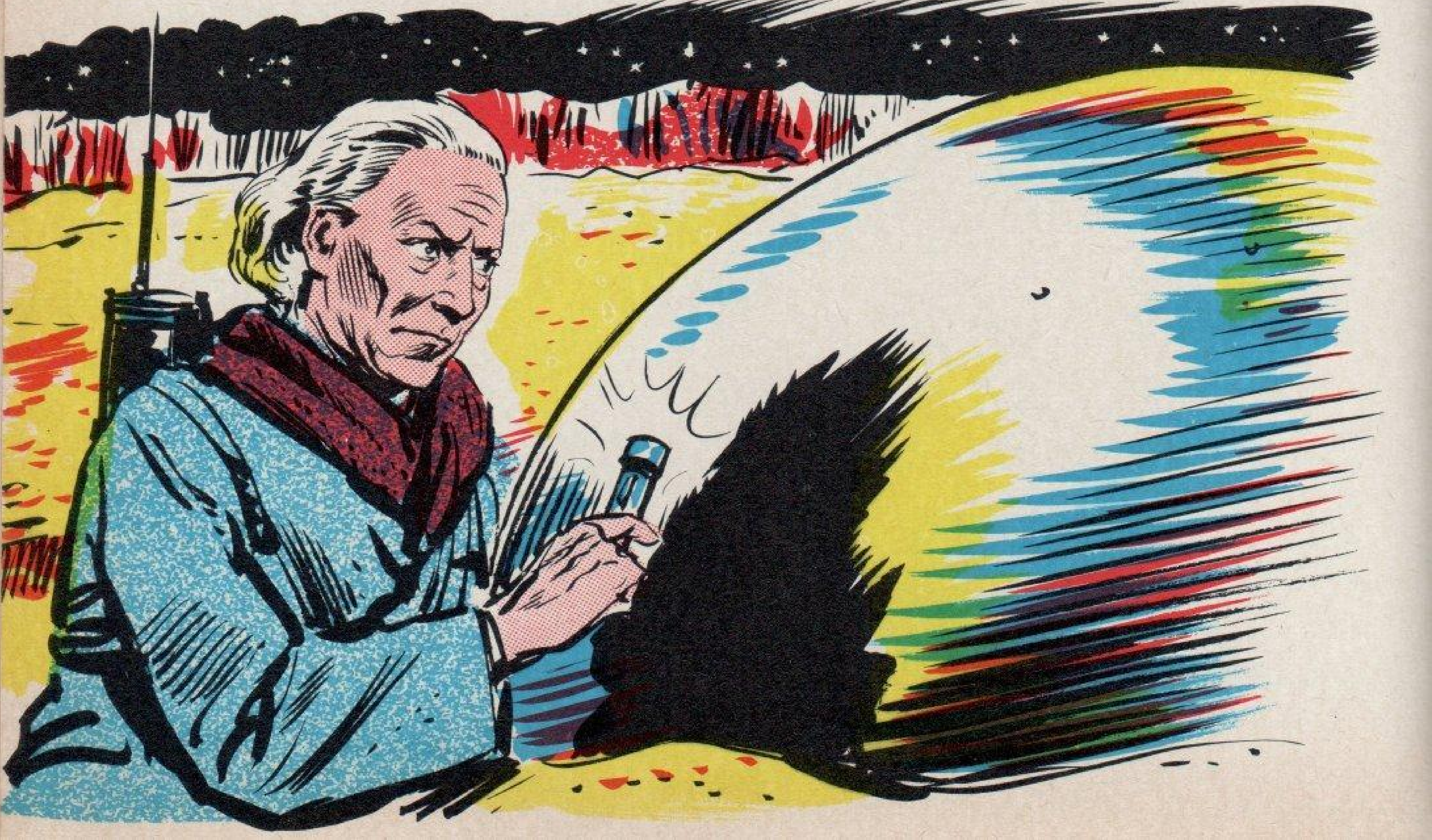
But the radio gave him back no reply, only the monotonous low repetition of the message he had first heard. Baffled he glowered round him at the jungle of termitaries and shuddered to think of his own position, one feeble, weaponless Earthman, alone amongst these hordes of malevolent giant insects, searching for the owner of a voice which could not hear him.

Looking for a needle in a haystack would be simplicity itself compared to his task, he told himself irritably. But, he reflected grimly, a needle would glitter, wouldn't it? That was just what he could see ahead of him now . . . a dull glitter that lay athwart two anthills relatively close to each other. Excitedly now he pressed on until he came to the thing. It was circular and was half-buried in the sandy soil. On every side rose the gigantic anthills and here it lay, like a child's lost ball, unspied by the Zarbi, many of whom were even then crawling over the sand that had gathered on the top. Dr Who sensed that he had reached his objective. He was convinced that inside this sphere was the owner of the voice, now sounding much louder in his earphone. He squatted down on the sand and for five minutes he spoke urgently into his microphone.

But it was soon obvious that whoever was inside the sphere—if indeed there was anyone inside it—either had no receiver or else one that was out of order. He leaned forward and rapped sharply on the metal surface. There was no reaction. He felt in his pocket and producing a torch he began a tattoo on the same place as before. Then he moved on and around, speculating that the hull of a space-ship must be very thick and searching for a thinner place. Thus it was that he came upon the door, half buried in the sand. The hollowness of his knocking told him there was emptiness behind it. Getting to his knees he began to scoop away the sand and soon uncovered the door, a small circle just about large enough for a normal man to wriggle through. In his excitement he leaned against it and the next moment he had fallen in through the doorway and into an open space. The door closed behind him, evidently on powerful springs.

It was hot and close and dark and he reflected that it must be an airlock, now broken, and that there would be another door into the ship proper. His torch soon revealed it and he put his shoulder against the panel. It needed all his strength to force it open against extremely powerful springs, but finally, with a mighty heave, he was inside the ship. Breathing hard through the breathing apparatus necessary for the thin air of Vortis, he got to his feet and smoothed down his clothes. "My goodness," he murmured to himself. "Now here is a very fine thing. Not a soul to greet me. Upon my word——"

Then he stopped, for the voice he had been hearing in his radio was now coming directly to his ear, and it was coming from a cabinet on the opposite wall of the room. He went closer and saw the reels of the recorder going slowly round and round, while the voice seeped hopelessly and monotonously from the speaker, repeating over and over again the appeal for help and the warning. He stared round him bitterly. So this was the end of his search. A tape recorder, endlessly sending out its message while no one lived and breathed here. He was as much alone as he had been before. Exasperated, he stared round him at what was evidently the control cabin of a space-ship. Compared to his *Tardis* it was, of course, a very primitive space-ship but he could recognise many of the principles which in his own ship



were so refined that only an expert could have seen the resemblance. A ship like this would require quite a crew. Where were they? Was this ship like the *Marie Celeste*, which was found drifting crewless on the sea of Earth? Just so this space-craft lay, marooned and crewless on this cruel planet of Vortis, so far from where men lived and laughed under the bright sun.

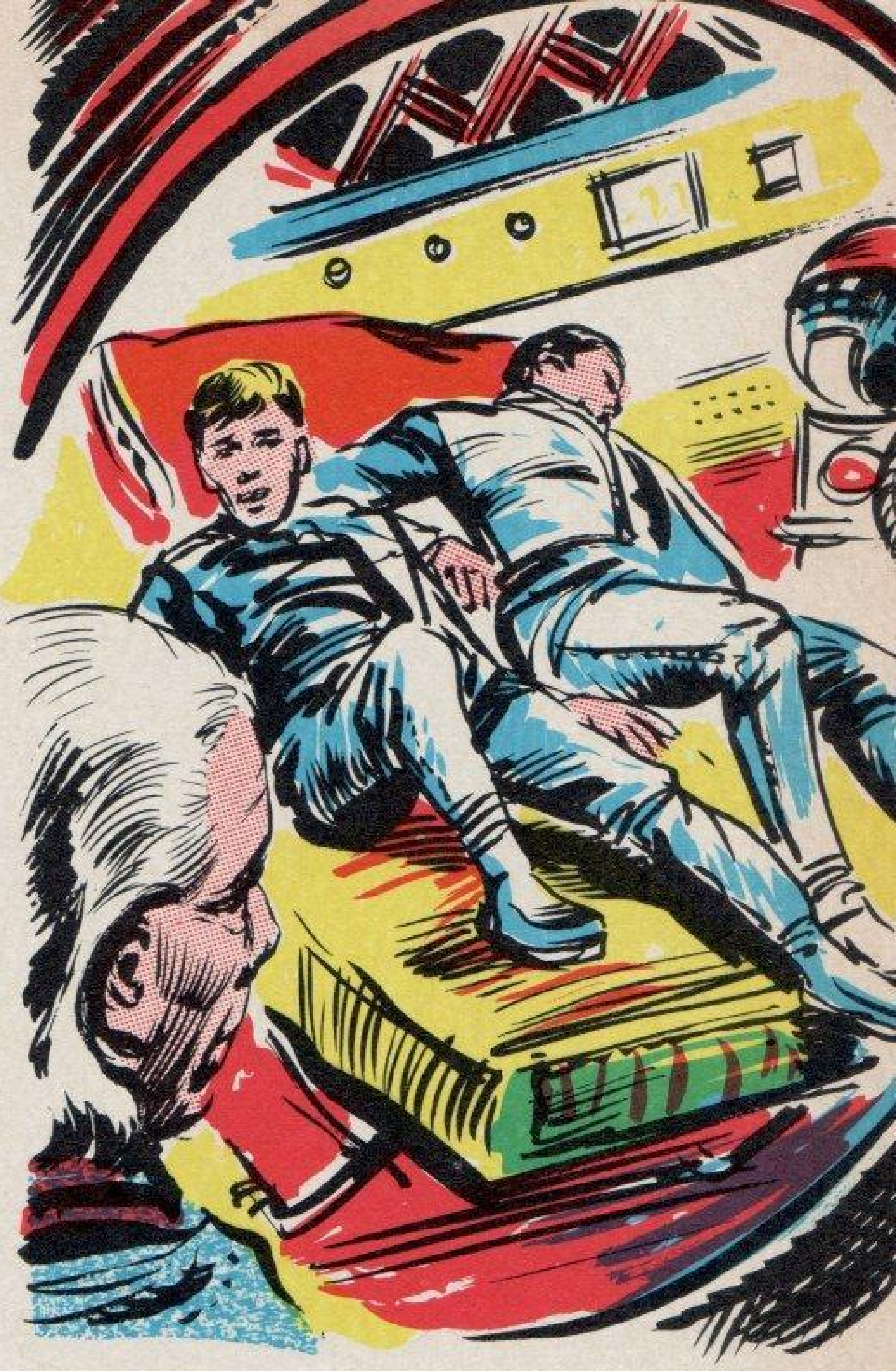
Then it was as though the heavens opened. He heard a voice. Something in him told him this was a human voice and no electronic reproduction. It was calling for help and the sound came from a round port. He struggled and fought with the unfamiliar mechanism and at last the door opened. He put his head through and his heart lightened. There were two people in there, a man and a boy. Both lay on mattresses and the man looked as though he was dead. His eyes were closed and his head had fallen sideways. But the boy was very much alive. He was sitting up on the mattress and crying out to the rescuer. Earth was the boy's original birthplace, the doctor decided. And the Twentieth Century was his period, that was obvious. His name was Gordon Hamilton and he was the son of the man who lay motionless on the mattress.

"All the others have gone," the boy told him. "Father was ill so they left us with food and water and went out to explore. You see we didn't know where we were. We crash-landed and father was injured. The others left us here and went off to get help. We could hear noises outside which told us the planet wasn't uninhabited and so——"

"The voice in the recorder?" asked the doctor. "What is that?"

"Father made that recording before he lost consciousness," Gordon said. "By that time we'd given up all hope that the others would ever return and also we'd seen through the other window those things out there. Dad said they must be for an invasion of Earth—there aren't any other planets inhabited in the Solar System. You should see them, hundreds and hundreds of them——"

"Now, sonny, wait a minute," Dr Who protested. "Not so fast. You talk of the Solar System. Why, this planet is nowhere near—tell me, how long had your ship been travelling? What is her motive-power?"



"Oh, we've been in space for two years," the boy said. "Father's ship moves by anti-gravity and can travel many times the speed of light."

The doctor reflected. This boy quite evidently had not the least notion that Vortis was not even in the Milky Way. A space-ship travelling even at many times the speed of light would need millions of Earth-years to traverse the waste space between galaxies. There was a mystery here. But this was scarcely the time to argue, he must see what could be done for the poor fellow lying on the mattress.

In spite of all his ministrations, however, he could get no response at all from the unconscious man, although his breathing was even enough. He was bearded, but evidently not old. There seemed to be no injury to the body and, baffled, the doctor got up from his knees and looked round.

"How many were in the crew?" he asked, staring round the small cabin shaped like the segment of a circle, which he judged to be one of the living quarters.

"There were six," Gordon told him. "All scientists, like Father. They took weapons and food and they've been gone five days now. I looked through both ports and saw the space-ships on one side and the big hills on the other. There are things crawling about on the hills. You came from outside—what are they? And where did you come from? Have you a ship here?"

Which question should he answer first, the doctor wondered. The boy did not seem to be aware that the Zarbi he had seen outside were one of the dominant species on this planet. He was evidently thinking in terms of human beings living on this world and assuming that the six crewmen had been captured or killed outside. What a position to find himself in. He went to the other window and looked out. At first, all he could see was a continuation of the multitudes of termitaries.

Then a gleam caught his eye. The things were so superficially like the termitaries that he could see why he had not recognised them before. Now he found he could see scarcely anything else. The things were space-ships of the archair torpedo shape. They were almost as tall as the anthills but, as he looked, he discerned that their outline was smooth and regular and that they gave out a deceptive gleam. He turned to the boy. "You said they were space-ships, my boy. How did you know that?"

"They couldn't very well be anything else, could they?" and the boy gave a youthful grin. "They're like the rockets they used on Earth in the first half of the century. They must travel by chemical explosions. They'll be slow enough and if we could get the *Solar Queen* repaired we could get back to Earth and warn them of the invasion."

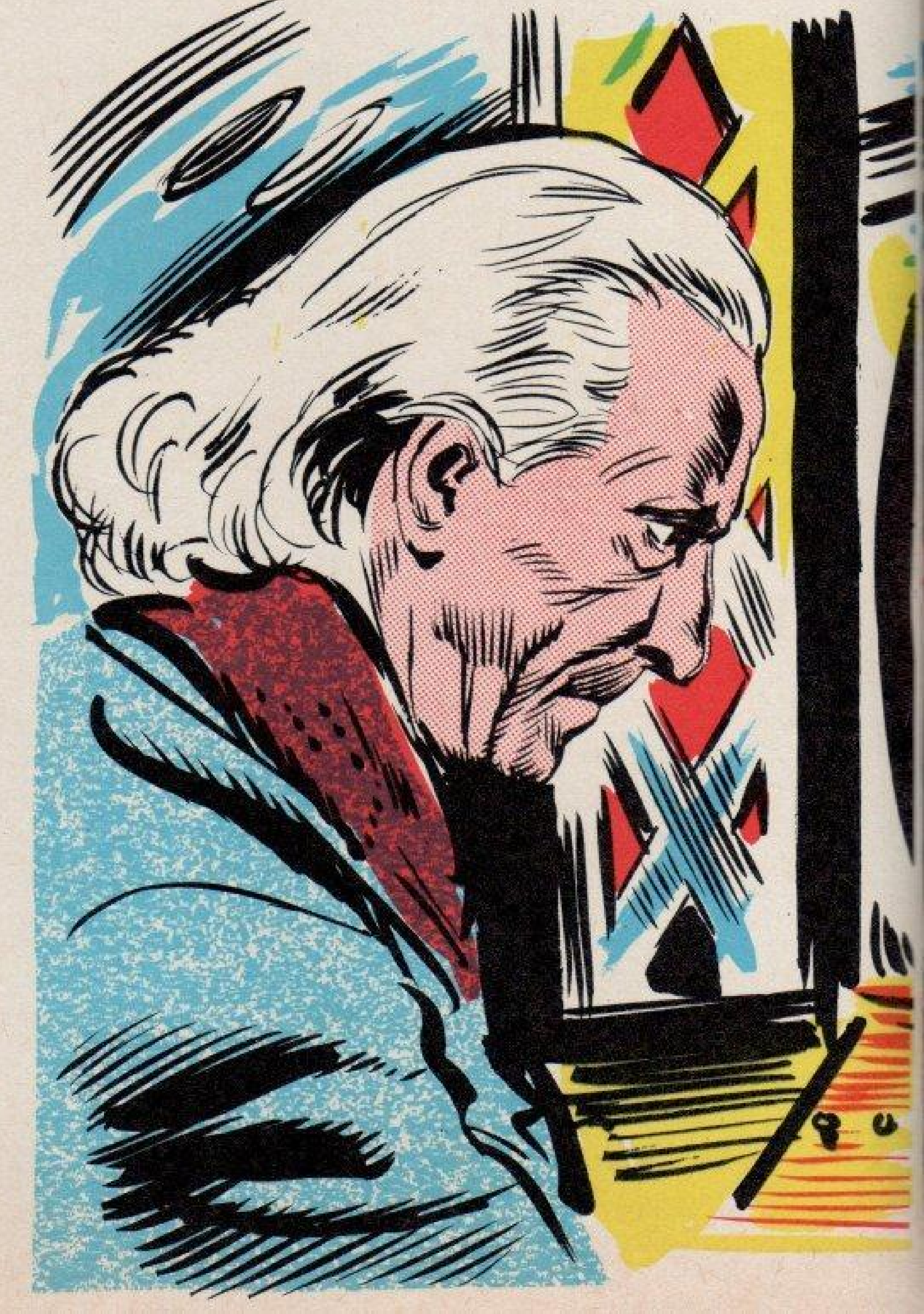
"Bless my soul, boy," snapped Dr Who. "What nonsense are you talking? Warn Earth, indeed! Why, we are millions and millions of miles from Earth. We are in a different space and a different time. And what's this talk of invasion? Who is going to invade Earth?"

"I'm only telling you what Father told me," said the boy stubbornly. "Before he went unconscious he used to lie still as though he was listening. He said there were messages sort of drifting into his mind. He said it was almost like eavesdropping on someone else talking by radio or telephone. But it wasn't either of those because there wasn't any apparatus. He said there was a force on this world which was intent on invading Earth. Water was what they wanted, water and vegetation. There were millions of them but always the talk seemed to be about just one individual, Dad said. He didn't get many details, most of the images that came into his mind didn't have any meaning for him. But the parts about the space-ships were very clear—Father knows about things like that. He'll be very interested in your ship."

"I shouldn't be surprised at that," said the doctor dryly. "Well, all you tell me is very interesting, Gordon, but we are wasting time. I am a scientist. I came here by a-ahem—rather different route than you did. My ship is outside, in a safe place, I hope. What we must do now is to work out some plan of campaign."

"We've time enough," said the boy in a matter-of-fact tone. "Dad says Earth is at present on the other side of the system and it'll be months before this world is in a position, you see, for the space-ships to travel there."

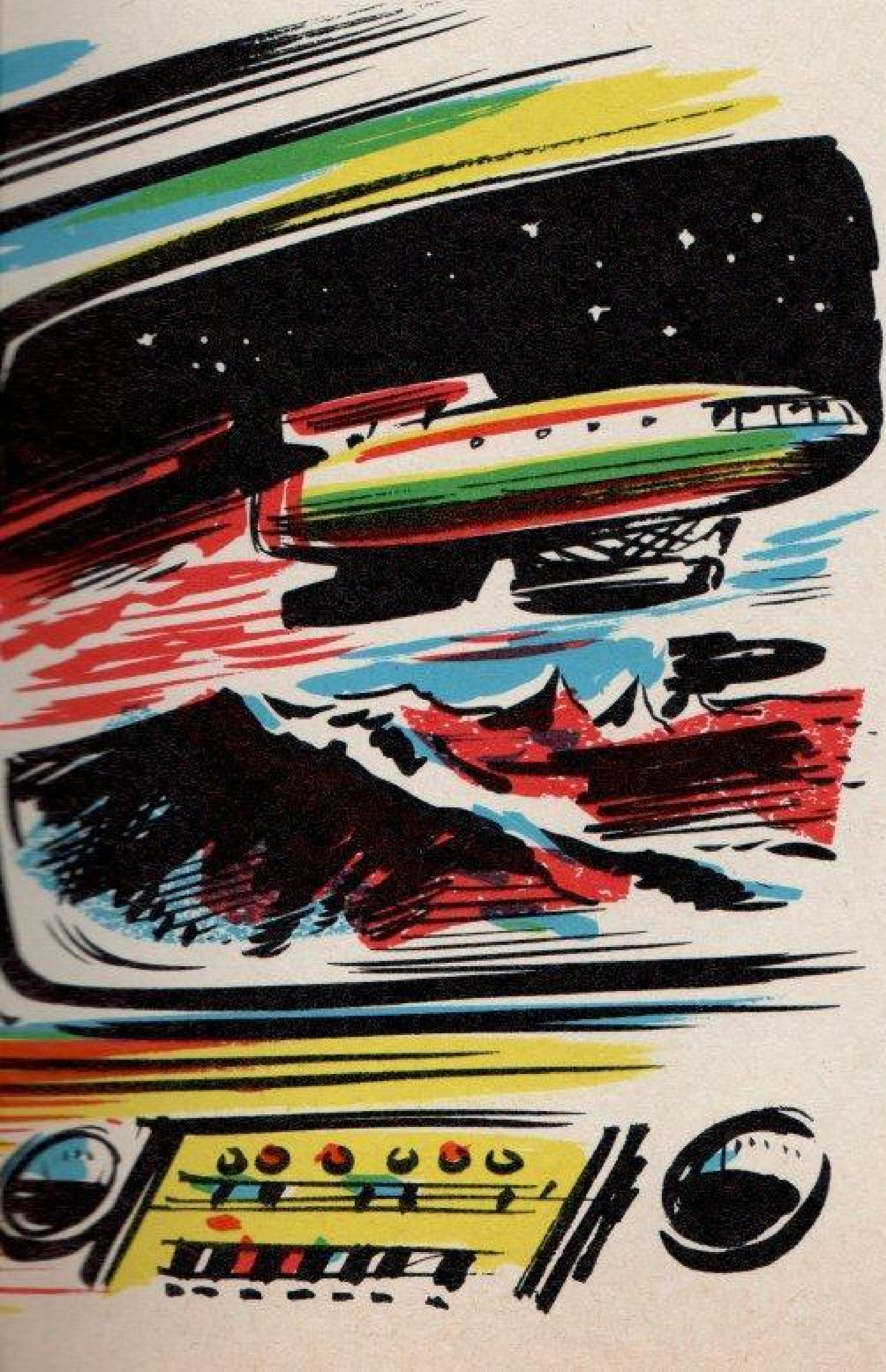
Dr Who looked at him curiously. "Did your father tell you any more about his ideas as to where this planet is?" he asked.



"Oh, yes," said the boy brightly. "It's a rogue planet," he said. "Not one of the Sun's real family. Those moons we can see, he said, are the outer moons of Jupiter, some of them. All the other planets are in the plane of the ecliptic but this one isn't. He said it's been driven into the Solar System under power. He said that if we could get out into the open at night we'd see the Solar System from an angle no other people have ever seen it from."

Dr Who reflected within himself without answering. It sounded all very wild and unlikely and, he told himself, irritably, downright impossible. But then, many of his own voyages would sound impossible to other ordinary people. This boy sounded tough and strong. He had not seemed frightened when the doctor had come upon him, marooned on an alien world, his father motionless and speechless and all his friends vanished. The doctor realised that Gordon would be his only helper in what he had decided must be done.

"We've got to follow your friends," he said tersely. "No use cowering in here. I've got a feeling they won't come back without our help."



The boy caught in his breath. "You mean, they've been captured?" he muttered. "But they all had weapons, they were scientists . . . they. . . ."

The doctor looked at him. The boy looked frightened enough now that the situation was put coldly to him. But this was no time for squeamishness.

"We've got to go and find them," he said as he got up. "Your father is as comfortable as we can make him. We'll take food and weapons and we'll secure your ship. And we've got to hurry. Five days, you say. We haven't a moment to lose."

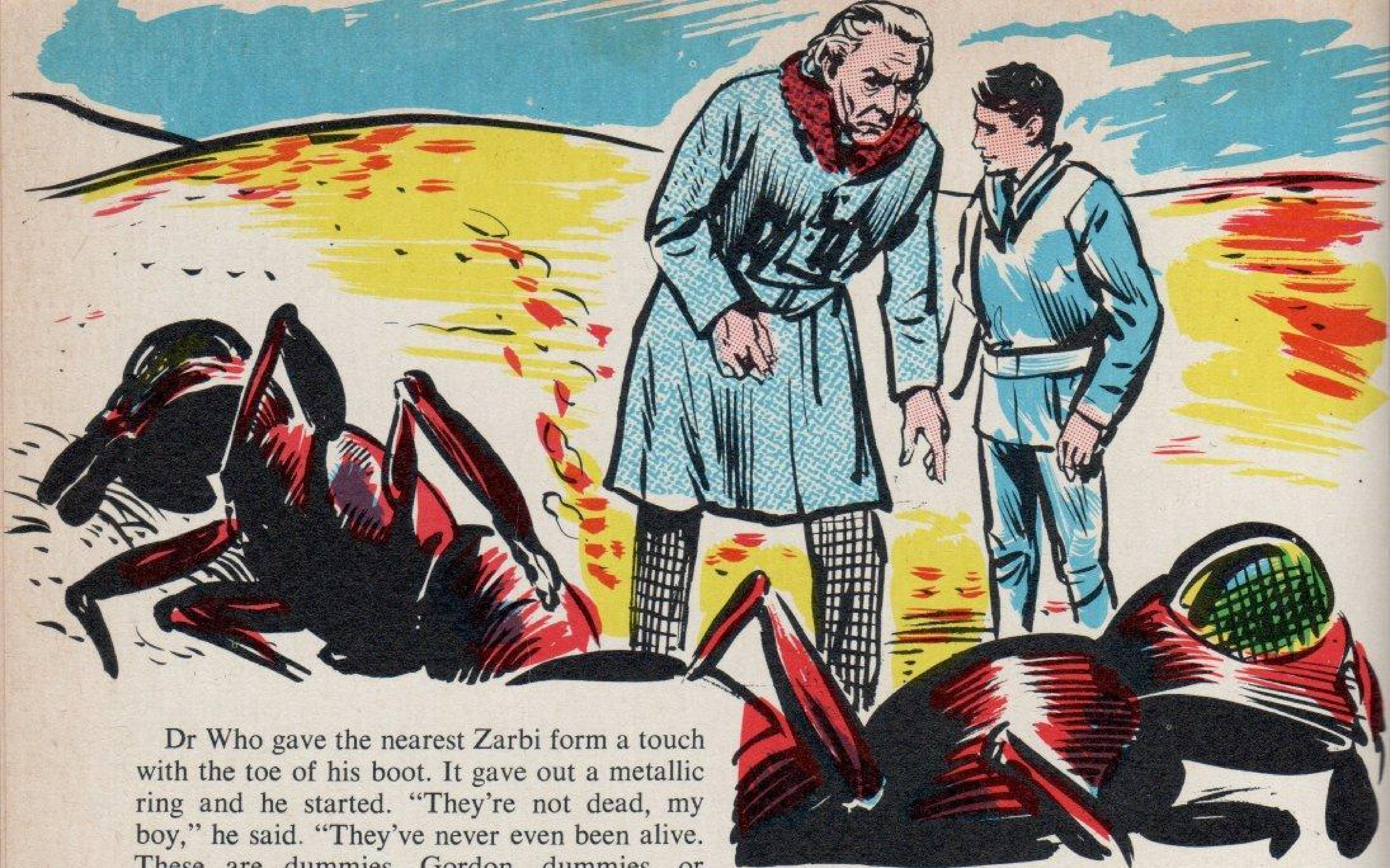
After five days of confinement, the boy seemed glad enough to go outside the marooned ship once the doctor had convinced him that his father would be in no greater danger alone and unconscious than with his son there, powerless to help him. They emerged from the broken airlock and the boy stood still, thunderstruck, staring round him.

"I saw it from the window," he stammered. "But I couldn't really believe. Why, they're insects—they're ants. They must be all as big as men. How can that be? Where are the *people* of this world?"

"These are the people of this world, which is called Vortis, Gordon," said Dr Who firmly. "They are named the Zarbi and they are one of two dominant races on this planet. I've met the others, a gentle, peaceful race, almost like Earth butterflies with great wings. They talk and they, too, are as big as men. But here I see none of the Menoptera, this is all Zarbi territory."

They stood looking in wonder round them. The crawling busy Zarbi seemed to be taking no more notice of them than they had of the doctor when he had passed them alone before finding the *Solar Queen*. Busily and furiously they crawled hither and thither about their mysterious business, each one seeming to be furiously intent on some unknown and urgent task. It was this furious haste that directed the doctor's attention to several of the creatures lying motionless on the sand between two of the hills. Maybe half a dozen in number they lay as still as stones. He cautiously led the way and they both stood looking down on them.

"Are they dead?" asked Gordon with a little shudder.



Dr Who gave the nearest Zarbi form a touch with the toe of his boot. It gave out a metallic ring and he started. "They're not dead, my boy," he said. "They've never even been alive. These are dummies, Gordon, dummies, or should I say robots? I wonder what is inside them."

Gordon looked round fearfully. It was evidently very strange to him that these hordes of loathsome huge insects appeared quite unaware of the existence amongst them of the humans. But Dr Who was not taking any notice at all of the creatures, he was too intent on this find.

"Upon my soul," he muttered. "It is only too true, these really are robots. Look, they are made of metal and they can be opened up and, do you know, a most ingenious idea occurs to me. Quick, lend a hand here. If we can use two of these things, we can follow the trail of your friends and see where it leads to and what has happened to them. Help me with this plate, it lifts off and inside . . . oh, my goodness gracious, what have we here?"

Inside the robot Zarbi there was indeed an inhabitant and Dr Who's memory went back to his previous visit to Vortis. It had then been in another galaxy but now it had crossed intergalactic space and was in the Milky Way. How many ages had passed since then? And yet these Earth people were of the modern era; time was indeed filled with paradoxes.

It was a dead Menoptera that lay inside the robot Zarbi and, with a certain amount of reverence, Dr Who removed the body from its case. "Quick, quick," he directed the boy. "That other one there, open it up, remove the body and get inside. We'll then lie still and talk and try to investigate the controls of these things. Without them we wouldn't get very far among those millions of brutes out there."

"But they aren't taking any notice of us," Gordon objected. "I don't like the idea of being cooped up in that dark thing. Can't we just leave them and go on and trust to luck? The Zarbi aren't interfering with us at all."

"That can't last," said the doctor testily. "Do as I say, boy. It's our best chance." He was mollified to see that Gordon at last gave way. As they lay inside the great metal replicas of the Zarbi, with the thorax plates half-open, Dr Who looked at anything that might be thought of as a control of these awkward creatures. In the dim light he could see levers which might move the legs and the feelers, the thorax and the abdomen. The eyes, though seeming compound from outside, were clear enough vision-plates from inside. As he tried a few tentative experiments he heard a frightened squeal from Gordon. The great Zarbi robot, with the doctor inside, stood up on six legs and waved its feelers about. Inside the doctor chuckled.

"It looks so real," said the boy, "that I was scared. How did you do it? Oh, I can feel now, these levers and handles. It isn't too hard, is it? I say, this is a bit of fun, isn't it? We can go anywhere in these things."

"Yes, yes, anywhere," said the doctor. "The trouble will be to determine which way we *shall* go. There'll be no trails in this soft sand and these forests of anthills are so confusing."

"I say," came Gordon's excited voice. "I've just thought of something. All the men had walkie-talkies, like that one of yours. If you send out a signal, at least some of them might hear it and reply."

"Now, why didn't I think of that?" mused Dr Who to himself as he switched on his radio. With the metal antenna protruding through the half-open thorax plate of his robot he sent out a powerful wave-band, designed to radiate to the outermost limit of the range of his set. The result of his action was astonishing in the extreme and was a total surprise to both of them. A sudden dead silence descended on the whole scene around them. Through the eye-plates the doctor saw that every one of the Zarbi in his view had stopped in its tracks as still as a stone. The sounds of their myriad cricket chirpings died away into utter silence, and on the surface of every termitary the hordes of Zarbi lay motionless, as though dead. The reason came to him like a thunderclap and feverishly he switched off his set and stayed trembling and sweating inside his metal prison.

"Can you hear me, Gordon?" he whispered after a while, and there came a muffled murmured reply. "I won't be able to use the radio, after all. You can see what has happened. There is something not too far away from us that is receiving our wave. Did you notice how all the Zarbi out there stopped moving and trilling as soon as I switched on? They're still motionless and silent. If I switch on again whatever it is will be able to get our location."

"The others have been captured then," came Gordon's hoarse reply. "Each of them had a walkie-talkie receiver but we've never heard any signal from any of them for four days. The last signal was cut off in the middle of a sentence."

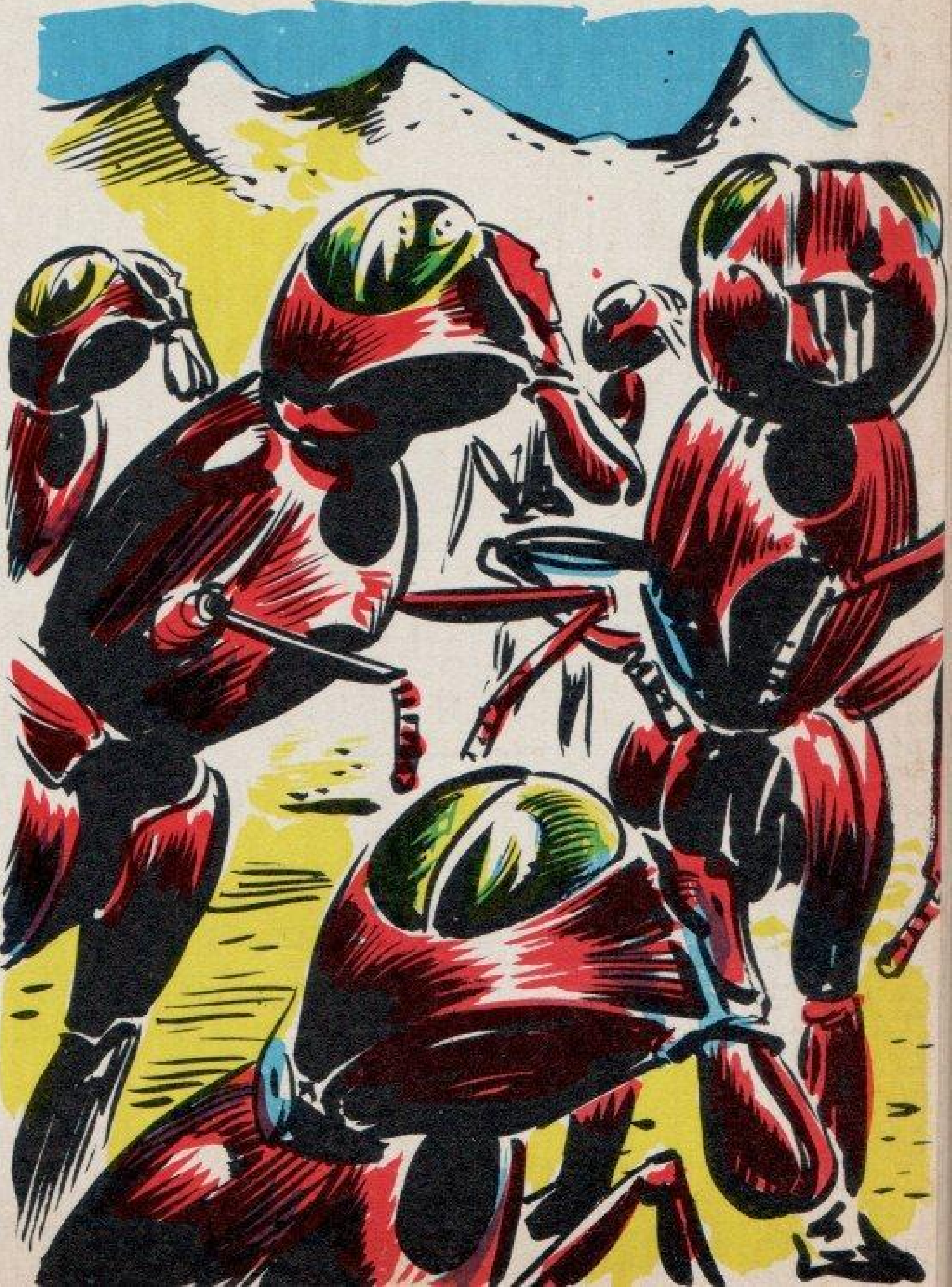
"What did the message say?" asked Dr Who urgently.

Gordon considered a moment. "Something about being very dark and very hot—I didn't really pay much attention."

"Tut, tut," snapped the doctor angrily. "That might have told us quite a lot. Now, listen carefully, Gordon. Stay absolutely still where you are. Don't touch any of those controls at all. We'll have to wait and see. It's obvious that all the Zarbi out there are controlled at a distance in some weird way. These robot Zarbi were operated by Menoptera who were killed in some unknown way. I can't think when I've ever been in such hideous danger—there must be millions of those beasts out there."

"They're moving again, look," came an excited murmur from Gordon.

It was true. The Zarbi hordes had come to life and were moving. But now there was none of the haphazard zigzagging about they had seen before. Now their movement was like a surge of the sea, all in one direction. The sounds of their shrill trilling note rose in crescendo all around them and the thunder of those millions of feet and feelers made the ground tremble. The doctor operated his controls quickly and turned. A vast wave of the creatures was approaching them from the rear. On every side they were surrounded by approaching Zarbi.



They would be swept along by a tidal wave of the hurrying Zarbi unless they could do something to avoid it. But escape proved impossible. He called out sharply to Gordon.

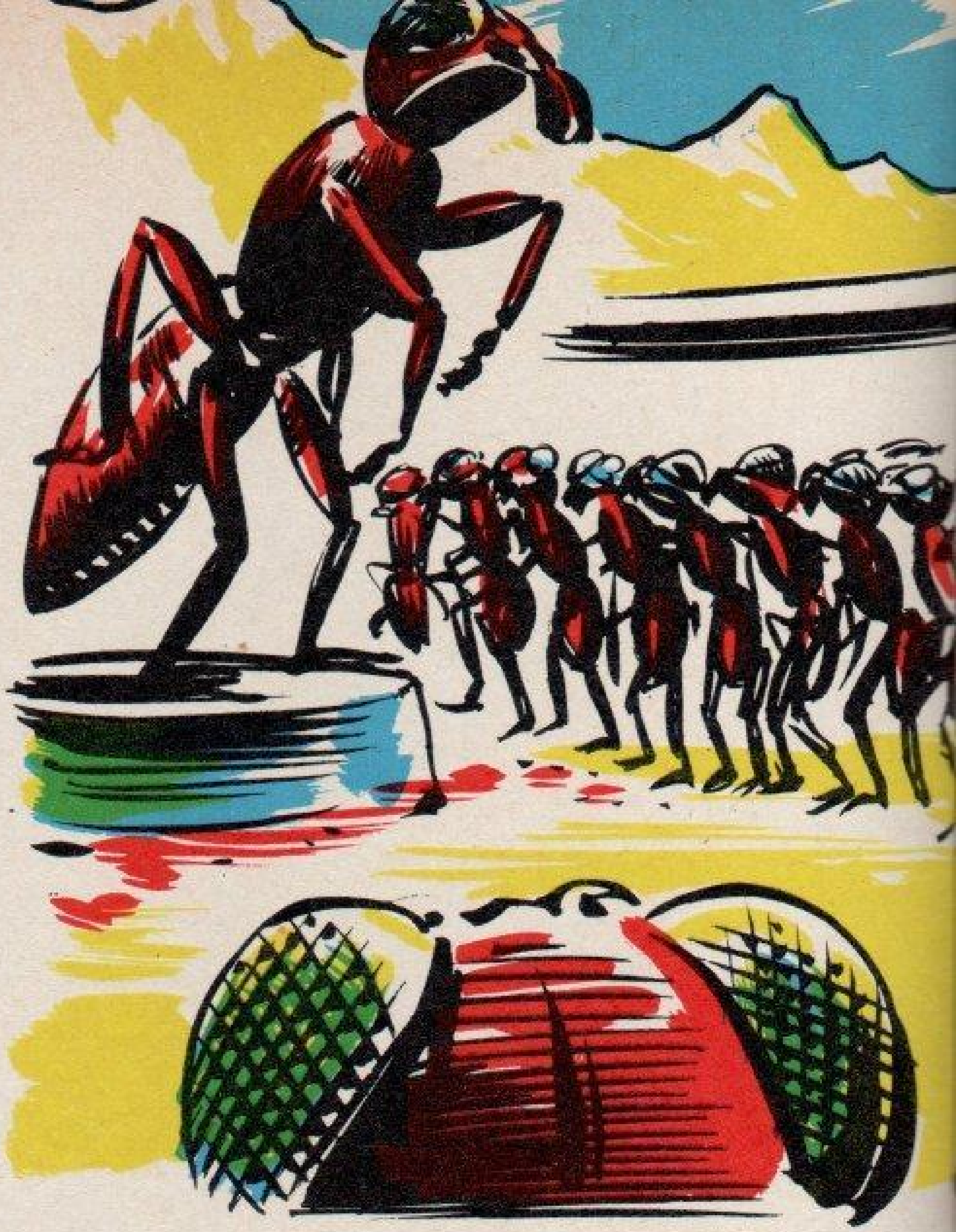
"Close the plate and hang on, boy, we're going to be swept along wherever these monsters are going. It's like a landslide, an avalanche."

His words were swept away as the robot moved along with the multitude of Zarbi. Like corks on a turbulent sea they were carried along, over sandy ground, through and around the anthills, past the great forest of torpedo ships.

Then Dr Who saw what was obviously their destination. It towered up over twice the height of all the other anthills. It was squatter than the others too and there was only one entrance, not a number of holes like all the others, but a great black gaping hole at the base of the conical mountain. Within minutes the doctor and Gordon, inside their robot Zarbi, were swept along with the hordes into the darkness inside. By some miracle they were not separated and as soon as the doctor could manage it he manipulated his levers so that one of the robot feelers was round the cleft between the thorax and the abdomen of Gordon's steed. It locked there and he quickly locked the lever. Together they had a chance, but if they were separated their plight would be hopeless indeed.

The heat and the smells were almost overpowering and the doctor felt as though he would faint at any moment. But he knew he must hang on to consciousness as long as possible. Once let either of them lose control of their robot and they would be trampled to a sticky paste by the myriads of scurrying feet.

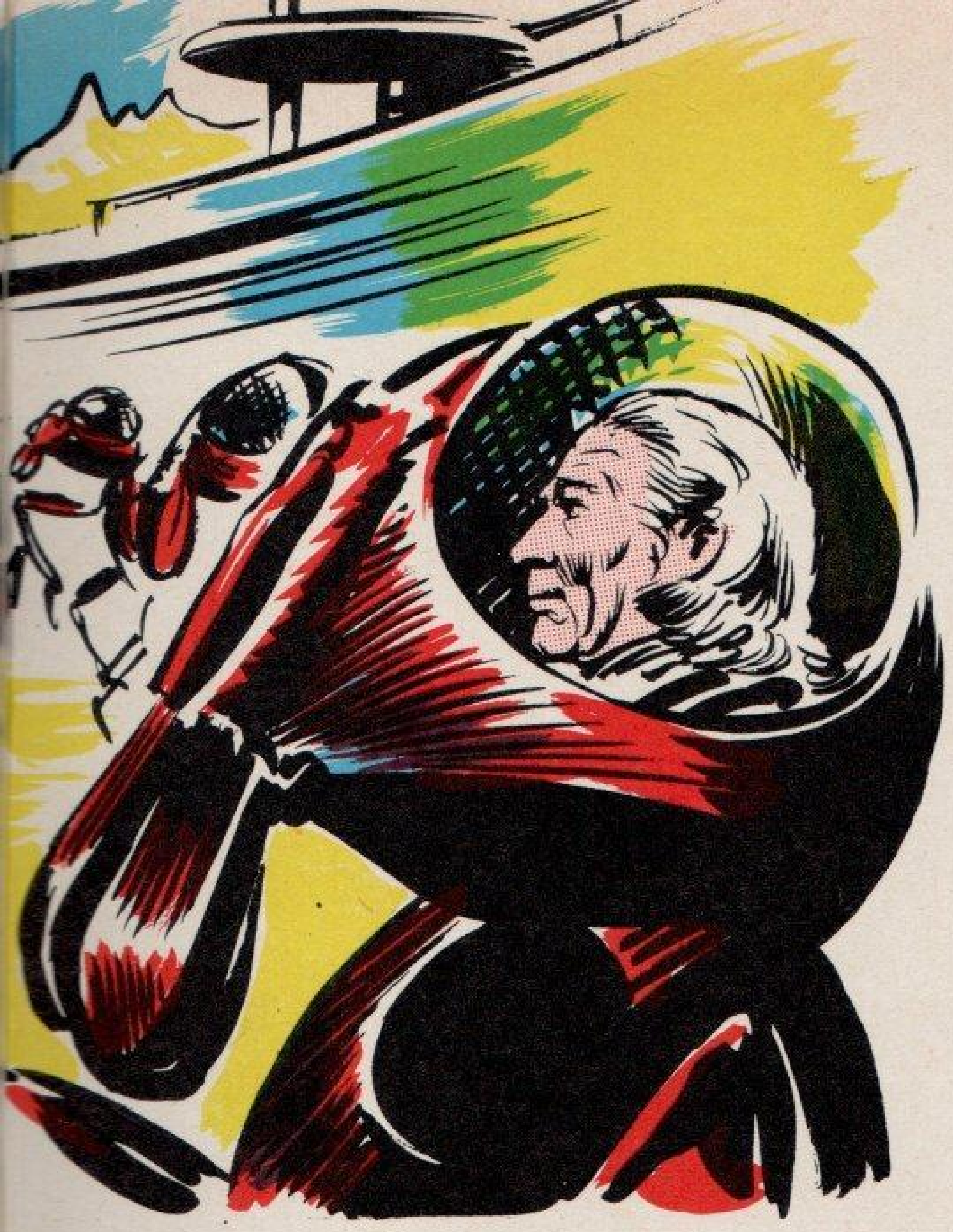
The Zarbi were being impelled in their headlong rush by some remote, but imperative call, he decided, for this was so obviously different from the previous random crawlings of the things. This great termitary must be the haunt of their ruler, or controller, great queen or whatever thing dominated these hordes of mindless creatures. Willy nilly, they were being swept along towards that thing. In reality this was just what he had wanted, the doctor thought wryly, and he shuddered. What sort of a mess had he landed himself in now? But the plight of this ill-fated expedition from Earth could not have been ignored. That he knew very well.



How did the Menoptera fit into all this? Was it an attempt by them to invade Zarbi territory by penetrating into it disguised as the native Zarbi? Or were the few they had seen merely spies? In that case why had they been killed, and how? There had been no time to examine the body he had hauled from the robot.

The air grew closer and hotter and now, through his vision-plates in the huge eyes of the thing, the doctor could see dim lights. What they were he could not discern: whether they were natural lights, such as fireflies or phosphorescence, or whether they were mechanical By now he was a little lightheaded and he was ready to credit the mysterious something, towards which they were obviously being carried, with miraculous powers and unheard-of technology. But the Zarbi were after all, he told himself, merely huge insects, weren't they? But were they merely insects? What about that forest of torpedo space-craft outside? What about the radio? And what, to crown it all, about the mysterious control under which all these myriads of Zarbi were moving?

It was a nightmare journey. Afterwards, Dr Who scarcely knew whether he had dreamed it all; whether he had really seen and heard all he remembered or whether he had imagined it all.



At the time it all seemed real enough but dreams sometimes have a quality of reality. There were caverns in which there was machinery, of that he was certain, *at the time*. He saw and heard great engines and vast furnaces with hordes of the Zarbi working round them. These would be the worker Zarbi, while the host in the midst of which they were being swept would be the soldiers.

He remembered the great mandibles of the robot in which he was imprisoned. Could it be possible that these monsters practised engineering? The idea was so fantastic that at first he scouted it. But then who or what had built those space-ships? And he was quite sure that the forms he saw working round the fires and at the machines were Zarbi.

They passed great galleries in which hung suspended, like sides of meat in a cold-store, thousands and thousands of grey shrouded forms. Of course, these would be the larvae of these creatures, the nurseries where the young ones were raised to make way for the dead Zarbi. Like grey unmoving spectres the rows and rows of larvae hung and the doctor shuddered violently.

A great opening to one side revealed, in a lightning glimpse, what he had suspected from the beginning. Perhaps two or three hundred feet in length she lay, a bloated queen with a host of workers feeding her and stroking her and attending to her wants. He saw and then it was gone and he felt very sick. There would be many of these queens in a termitary as large as this and from them had come the countless hordes of the Zarbi from outside.

Now the pace was slackening and Dr Who found a little more opportunity to see where they were being taken. Also the passages and the galleries were opening out. He felt certain that they were by now far underground, judging by the heat and the rising pressure. There came a time when the tide that bore them on stopped completely and they were at rest. Dazedly the doctor hung in his robot and then, moving gently, he knocked against the thing that held Gordon. An answering knock told him that the boy was at least alive. There had been no chance for them to communicate during that headlong flight.

It was like a vast amphitheatre, the doctor saw as he moved the great metal head from side to side, peering through the huge eye-plates. Rank upon rank of the Zarbi were there in great semi-circular rows, their number almost countless and all of them very still. Almost against his will his gaze was slowly, inexorably, drawn towards the middle of the great throng, where something sat upon a raised dais, with a glowing light shining down upon it from a roof that was almost out of sight. As the doctor's eyes reluctantly reached it, he recoiled in horror and downright disbelief.

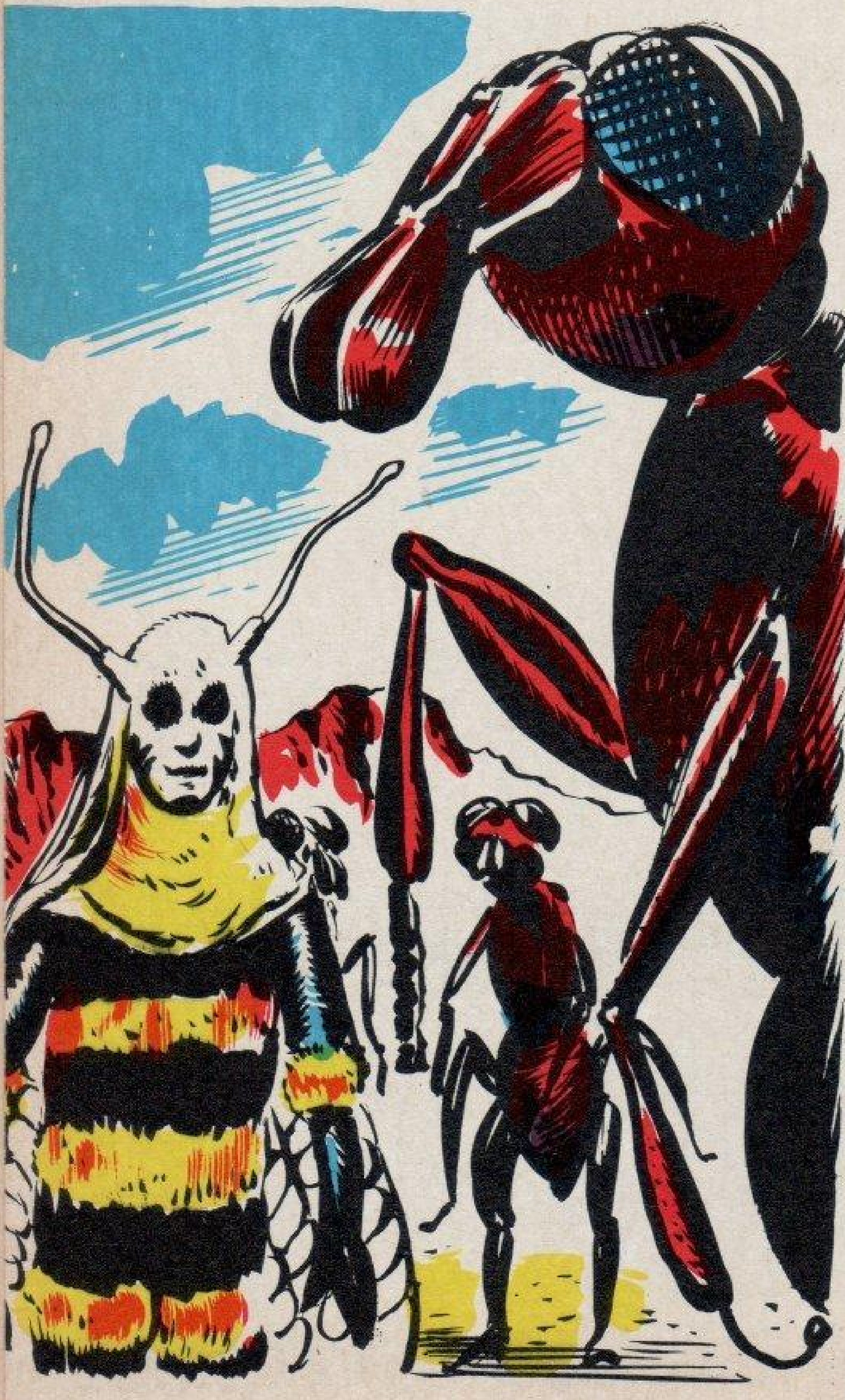
That it was a Zarbi was obvious enough, for its form was the same as that of all the others crowding round him motionless on all sides.

But its size! It towered perhaps twenty feet tall standing on its dais, three times the height of a normal Zarbi and completely motionless on its pedestal.

The doctor tore away his eyes to gaze in startled astonishment at another scene. In a cleared space in front of the gigantic Zarbi were two parties of creatures, and one party was human. There were six of them and they were standing like marble statues in a tight group. Opposite them was another party and Dr Who knew that these were Menoptera, although they were wingless and as motionless as the human beings. He heard the hoarse voice of Gordon close by. "They're down there. They're still alive, all of them. How are we going to escape with them from here?"

"A very good question, my boy," muttered the doctor grimly. "If you have any ideas, now is the time to express them. I confess that at this very moment I must admit myself totally baffled. We got in easily enough, but I fancy it's going to be mightily harder to get out, hm?"

He could see now that all the members of each of the two parties, evidently all prisoners, were quite still as if made of stone. He tried to remember all he knew about the insect world of Earth, which was indeed remarkably little. Anyway, why try to relate these Zarbi to Earth ants or termites, or whatever? The conclusions would be quite mistaken. He went on examining the scene closely and saw that all the prisoners wore something that looked like a loose collar or ring round their necks. It shone a little and fitted very loosely. He watched as one of the Zarbi attendants on the Zarbi Supremo, for that is what the doctor had called the creature in his own mind, moved forward. The creature's mandibles hovered above the head of one of the motionless Menoptera prisoners and the ring was lifted from the Menoptera's neck. In the silence the doctor could just hear the voice of the Menoptera speaking to Zarbi Supremo up on its dais.



It was really most exasperating, the doctor thought irritably. He could hear the voice but not the words. From the giant Zarbi there came no sound at all. How it was replying he could get no idea unless perhaps it was through some electronic translator invisible to the doctor from where he stood.

They must somehow get closer to the centre of operations. His robot nudged Gordon's and pushed it forward through the massed ranks of motionless Zarbi. None of them took any notice and gradually inch by inch the two robots edged their way forward until at last they were on the rim of the cleared space. Now Dr Who found that he could hear what the Menoptera was saying.

"You will have to kill every one of the Menoptera on Vortis before we will agree to help you," the soft voice was saying. "We have watched you over the generations as your mighty engines have moved this planet into this alien system. You are transgressing the paths of Nature. Vortis can be made such a world as you want. A very little of the powers you have spent would have done this. But you cannot invade a peaceful world as you plan. First you would have to slaughter all of the creatures that live there. They are not insects, they are mammals and their world is suited to their needs. Vortis can be made suitable to beings of our own species. You say that you need us of the Menoptera as your ambassadors to the humans, because we speak as they do. You would have us speak to them as though we came in peace because you know they would kill you as soon as they saw what you were. Then, when their suspicions were lulled by us, you would turn on them all and exterminate them. We will not help you to do this."

There was a silence and the great Zarbi on the dais moved. A limb angled out and the doctor saw it manipulate a dial on an instrument board beside it. Almost dancing with rage the doctor knew that it was replying to the speaker. But not one sound could he hear. It was obvious, however, that the Menoptera was hearing something. That instrument must be some means by which the Zarbi brainwaves were translated into speech in the brain of the Menoptera.

"You must kill us all then," came the reply from the Menoptera. "It will be war between us as has never happened before. On our hemisphere we are building weapons which will give you pause. We who speak to you now are doomed, that we well know. These humans also will die, for we recognise that in you has arisen a new spirit among the Zarbi, the spirit of cruelty and destruction. We cannot halt you now, we are too few. But later you will not find your task easy, I promise you that."

A limb shot out from the great Zarbi body and hovered above the head of the Menoptera. Like a moth caught in a flame the creature shrivelled and was gone. Dr Who writhed in his excitement and his robot knocked against that of Gordon.

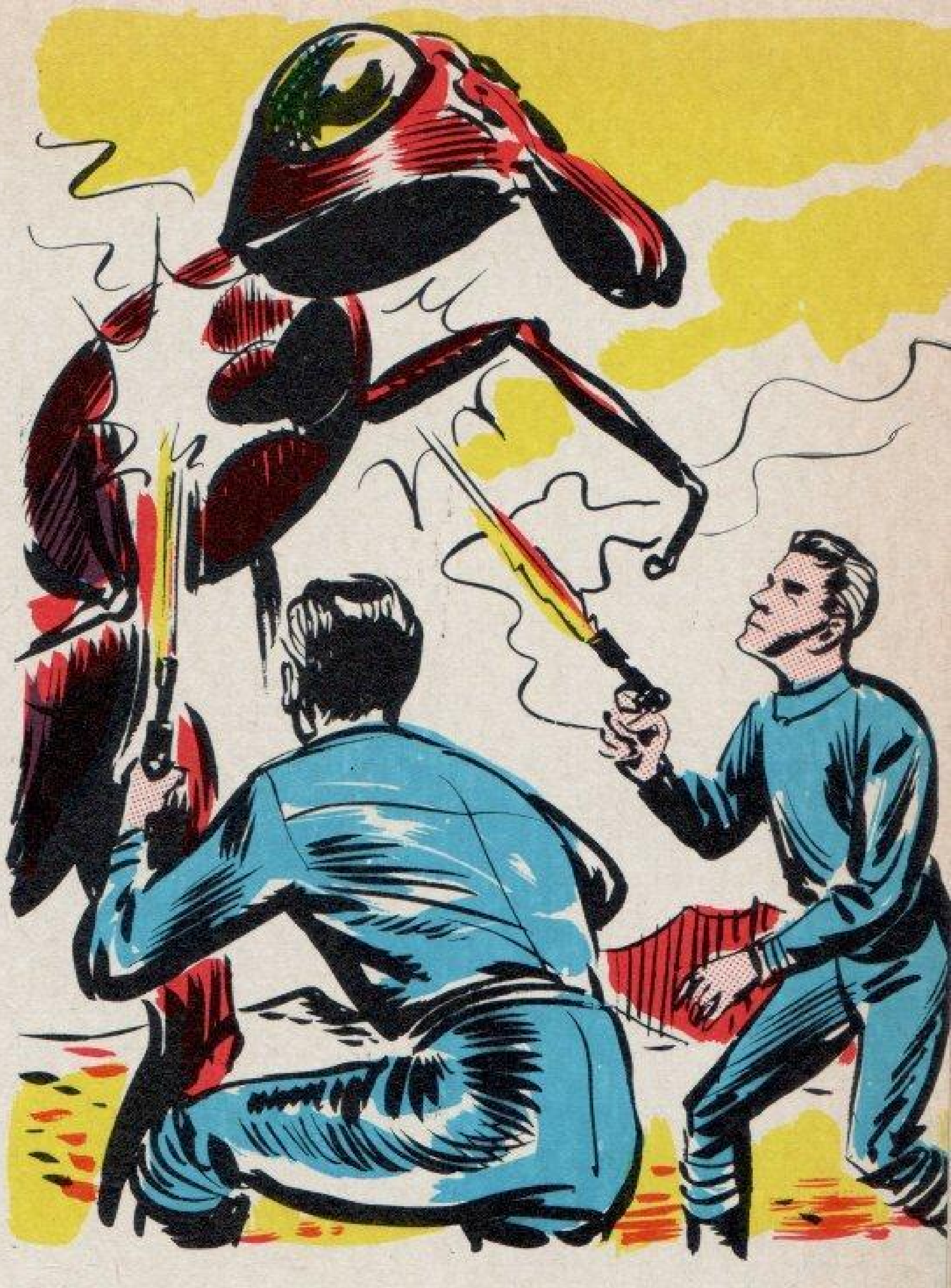
"The mandibles, boy," he cried, discretion now gone. "Operate the mandibles and lift those collars from round the necks of your men. I'll do the same. These creatures round us are all hypnotised. If we are quick enough we may bring it off."

His robot angled forward awkwardly and the mandibles, operated by inside levers, went up over the heads of the human prisoners. First one, then two, then three. Gordon by that time having found the right controls, freed the last three. Dr Who could feel the crackling and surging of electric waves as he worked and it seemed obvious that the great Zarbi was fighting them with its only weapons, weapons which, thank heaven, were proving ineffectual against human organisms.

Then the doctor was out of his robot and dragging Gordon out.

"Your guns," he yelled to the released prisoners, still dazed. "That thing up there. Fire anywhere. Empty your magazines. The head, the thorax, the abdomen, anywhere. We don't know where the brain and nerve centres of that thing are——"

Around them the vast hordes of the Zarbi were awakening as the hypnotic control of the giant creature took hold of them. Their trilling sound grew and grew into a crescendo and drowned the noise of the shots as the six crewmen and the doctor emptied their revolvers into the giant form above them. Many of the shots ricochetted from the hard carapace, but many found their way through chinks in that chitinous armour. The doctor saw the creature stagger, its limbs and feelers thrashing about as though in agony. The great expressionless compound eyes brooded downwards over these lilliputian creatures who were intent on thwarting its dreams of world conquest.



It was like a great building falling when at last death came to it. Even above the shrill chirpings of the Zarbi, the crash of that downfall could be heard. It lay still, a fallen hulk of insectile ambition, while all around it surged the myriads of its fellow-creatures which it had dominated.

While they had been attacking it, all eight humans had felt the thrusting limbs and feelers of the Zarbi striving to overcome them, but they had taken no heed but kept on pumping lead into the giant menace above.

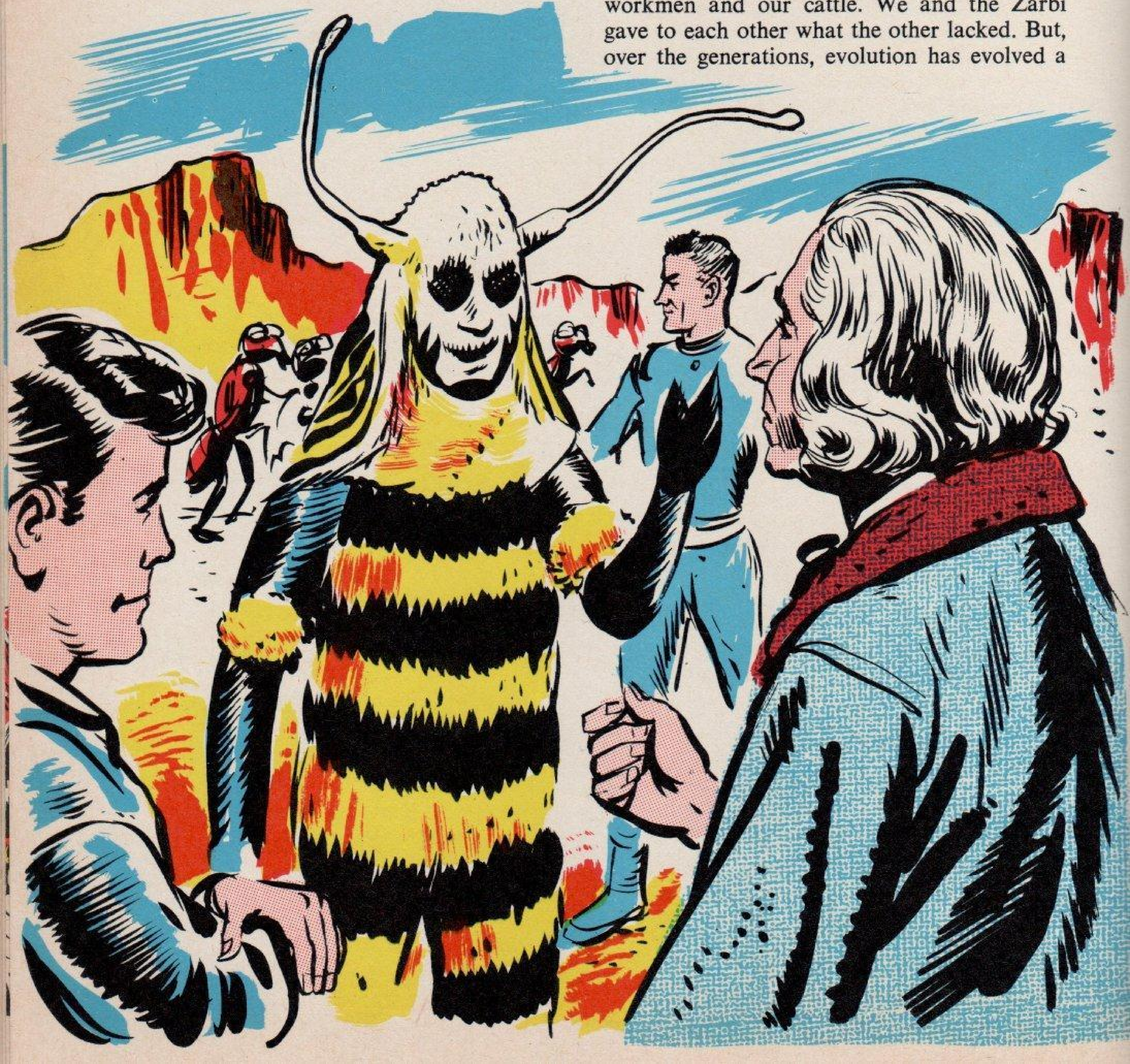
Now the Zarbi were leaving them alone and milling about in the haphazard fashion that seemed to be their natural life. The little group stayed in a tight circle, watching with apprehension; but they were not attacked. Dr Who heaved a sigh of relief, and going over to the group of Menoptera prisoners who were still standing motionless, he released them by lifting from their necks the rings which in some odd way must have hypnotised them. Voices began to speak to him. Not human voices, but the soft furry voices of the folk he remembered from his previous meetings on Vortis with the peaceful Menoptera. But he took no notice. He wanted to be with his own kind again.

"Your father, Gordon, how is he?" asked one of the men. "And you, sir, how in heaven's name did you come in the nick of time? We'd given ourselves up for lost. You're from Earth. Where is your ship? When did you land?"

Dr Who chuckled. "One thing at a time, my friend. First, we've got to get out of here, you know. Even with these Zarbi uncontrolled it's going to be hard."

"Zarbi? Zarbi?" said another crewman. "Are these creatures, these bugs, the Zarbi, then? Are they intelligent?"

"They are no more intelligent than their needs demand," came a soft voice and one of the Menoptera stood at their shoulders. "For many years we and the Zarbi shared this world and lived in peace. They were our servants, our workmen and our cattle. We and the Zarbi gave to each other what the other lacked. But, over the generations, evolution has evolved a



mighty intelligence in that creature who dominated them and dreamed of world conquest, even of universe conquest. We had no weapons but we are building some and we came as an expedition to see what they were planning and if we could stop them. Look, there are our people emerging from their robots."

All around them from recumbent Zarbi were emerging many of the Menoptera. These were full-grown magnificent specimens, who spread and shook their wings after their confinement. There were many hundreds of them and at once they began to shepherd the now docile Zarbi and leave a path for the exit of the released prisoners. Wonderingly, the humans followed the first Menoptera party, the wingless ones, no doubt elders among them. Their path led upwards through the galleries and passages, out to the world of day.

Gordon's father still lay unconscious but he was breathing better. The rescued men crowded into their ship in great excitement for they had given up all hope of ever seeing it again.

"If you agree, doctor," one of them said. "We can use your ship to ferry us across to Earth to get equipment to repair our ship. In time we could do it ourselves but with Earth being so relatively near——"

"That's what puzzles me about the whole thing," said Dr Who. "By my calculations this planet should be in another galaxy altogether. But Gordon kept telling me about the moons of Jupiter and all such nonsense as that."

"Not nonsense," laughed a crewman. "We found this planet when we were headed for the moons of Jupiter in fact. How it got here and how long it has been here we don't know. How it's been missed by Earth observers beats me."

"The evil Zarbi intelligence devised mighty engines which drove our planet out of its orbit many, many millions of miles away," explained one of the Menoptera. "It was searching for a green, damp world such as yours. We have only just arrived in your skies but before very long we will leave you and will sweep out of your system to find whatever fate has in store for us."

"Not so fast," said one of the men belligerently. "Those engines of the Big Bug we killed will come in mighty handy for humanity, I can tell you. There'll be many things that creature invented that we can use and profit by."

"What profit can be made out of evil?" came the soft voice. "No, we will use the engines to drive our world on a new orbit out of your sky and then we will destroy them and seal them off. It is not given to creatures to do what Zarbi Supremo was trying to do."

"I heartily agree," said Dr Who enthusiastically. "Now, you men must realise that this planet belongs to the Menoptera and the Zarbi, so long as they keep their places, of course. There must be no thought of using the powers that creature developed to dominate other beings."

"You're crazy, old man," said the other coldly. "And what in thunder do you think we're doing exploring the universe? We're looking for just such set-ups as this, inhabited by weak, unintelligent creatures. The natural resources of this world alone, even without the powers that Big Bug down there developed, will put Earth technology millions of years into the future."

There was a stirring of Menoptera wings and the crewman drew his revolver. The doctor was glad to see that the others hung back, while Gordon remained at his father's side in the globular space-ship. He lifted an arm and felt himself clasped by a pair of tiny furry clawlike hands. He was lifted into the air and he saw that all the Menoptera were rising, those wingless ones being lifted by their flying fellows. He looked down. Angrily, the man was firing his empty revolver up at them and then the scene faded from his sight.

Gently and easily they dropped him beside his *Tardis*. "We have legends in our world," said one of the Menoptera, "of you and your strange vessel. We know we have nothing to fear from you, strange immortal human who can flit in and out of all the ages. We will watch those others and will ensure that they bring no harm to us. It was good that you came to our rescue, for how else could Zarbi Supremo have been toppled from his lofty height?"

The doctor beamed at them. Sheer human ingenuity and refusal to admit defeat had won again, he thought, as he turned and went through the great doorway. Activating the controls that would close it, he wondered just what would be the future of the strange world of Vortis.

WHO IS

AFTER Sir Isaac Newton came Dr Albert Einstein. After Einstein came Dr Who. His is the master-mind that spans all spatial infinity and all temporal eternity in his strange small ship, the *Tardis*.

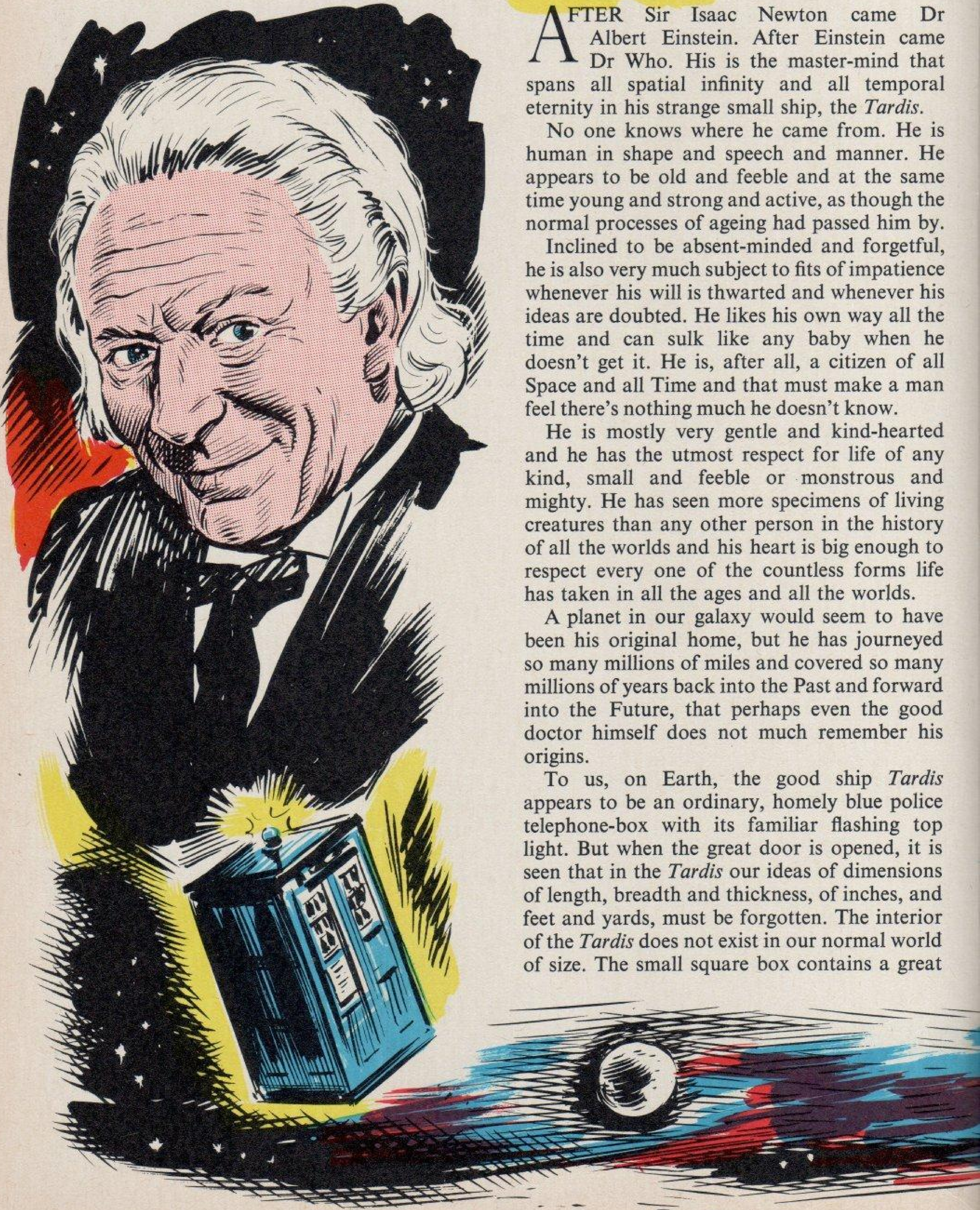
No one knows where he came from. He is human in shape and speech and manner. He appears to be old and feeble and at the same time young and strong and active, as though the normal processes of ageing had passed him by.

Inclined to be absent-minded and forgetful, he is also very much subject to fits of impatience whenever his will is thwarted and whenever his ideas are doubted. He likes his own way all the time and can sulk like any baby when he doesn't get it. He is, after all, a citizen of all Space and all Time and that must make a man feel there's nothing much he doesn't know.

He is mostly very gentle and kind-hearted and he has the utmost respect for life of any kind, small and feeble or monstrous and mighty. He has seen more specimens of living creatures than any other person in the history of all the worlds and his heart is big enough to respect every one of the countless forms life has taken in all the ages and all the worlds.

A planet in our galaxy would seem to have been his original home, but he has journeyed so many millions of miles and covered so many millions of years back into the Past and forward into the Future, that perhaps even the good doctor himself does not much remember his origins.

To us, on Earth, the good ship *Tardis* appears to be an ordinary, homely blue police telephone-box with its familiar flashing top light. But when the great door is opened, it is seen that in the *Tardis* our ideas of dimensions of length, breadth and thickness, of inches, and feet and yards, must be forgotten. The interior of the *Tardis* does not exist in our normal world of size. The small square box contains a great



DR WHO?

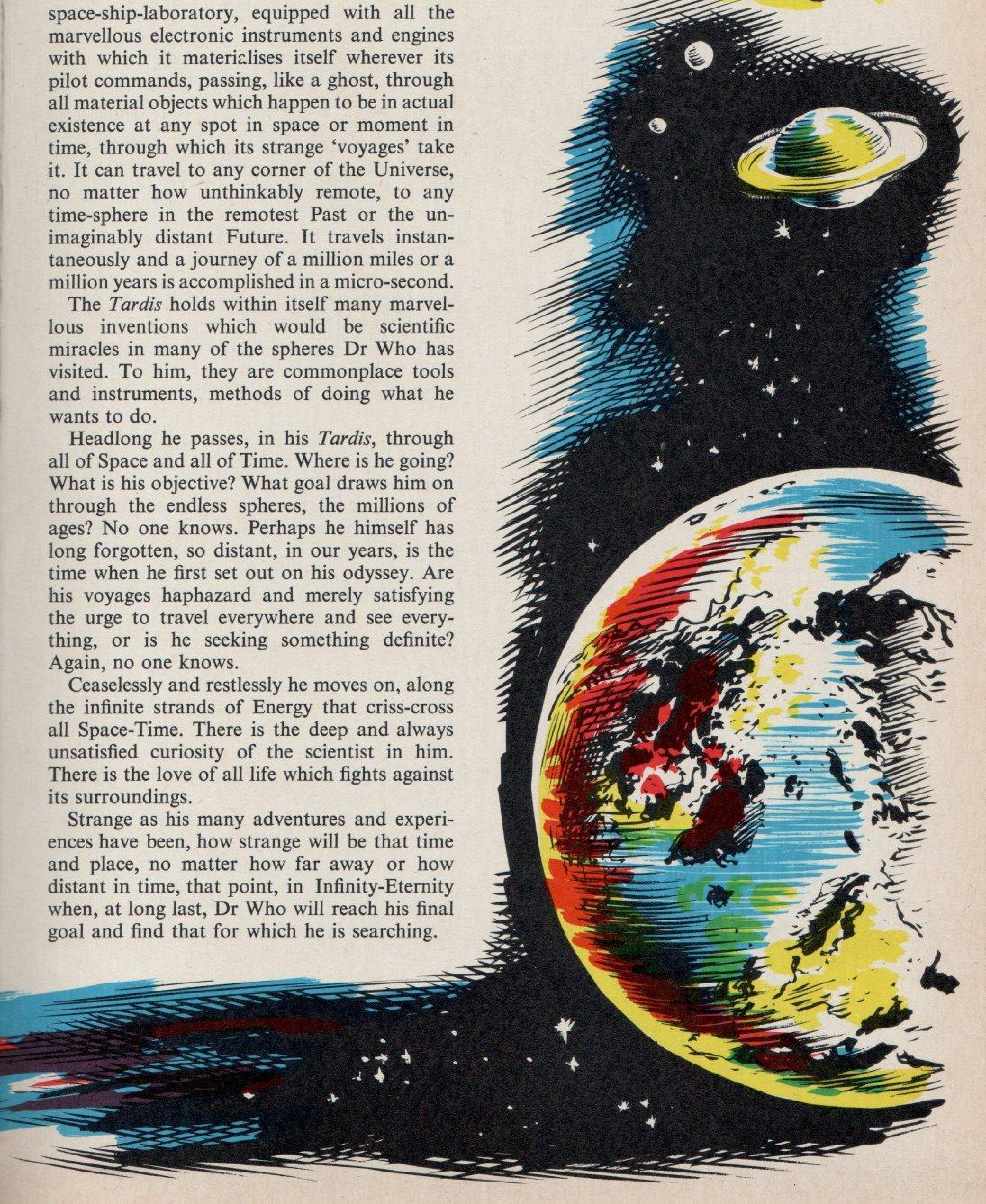
space-ship-laboratory, equipped with all the marvellous electronic instruments and engines with which it materialises itself wherever its pilot commands, passing, like a ghost, through all material objects which happen to be in actual existence at any spot in space or moment in time, through which its strange 'voyages' take it. It can travel to any corner of the Universe, no matter how unthinkably remote, to any time-sphere in the remotest Past or the unimaginably distant Future. It travels instantaneously and a journey of a million miles or a million years is accomplished in a micro-second.

The *Tardis* holds within itself many marvellous inventions which would be scientific miracles in many of the spheres Dr Who has visited. To him, they are commonplace tools and instruments, methods of doing what he wants to do.

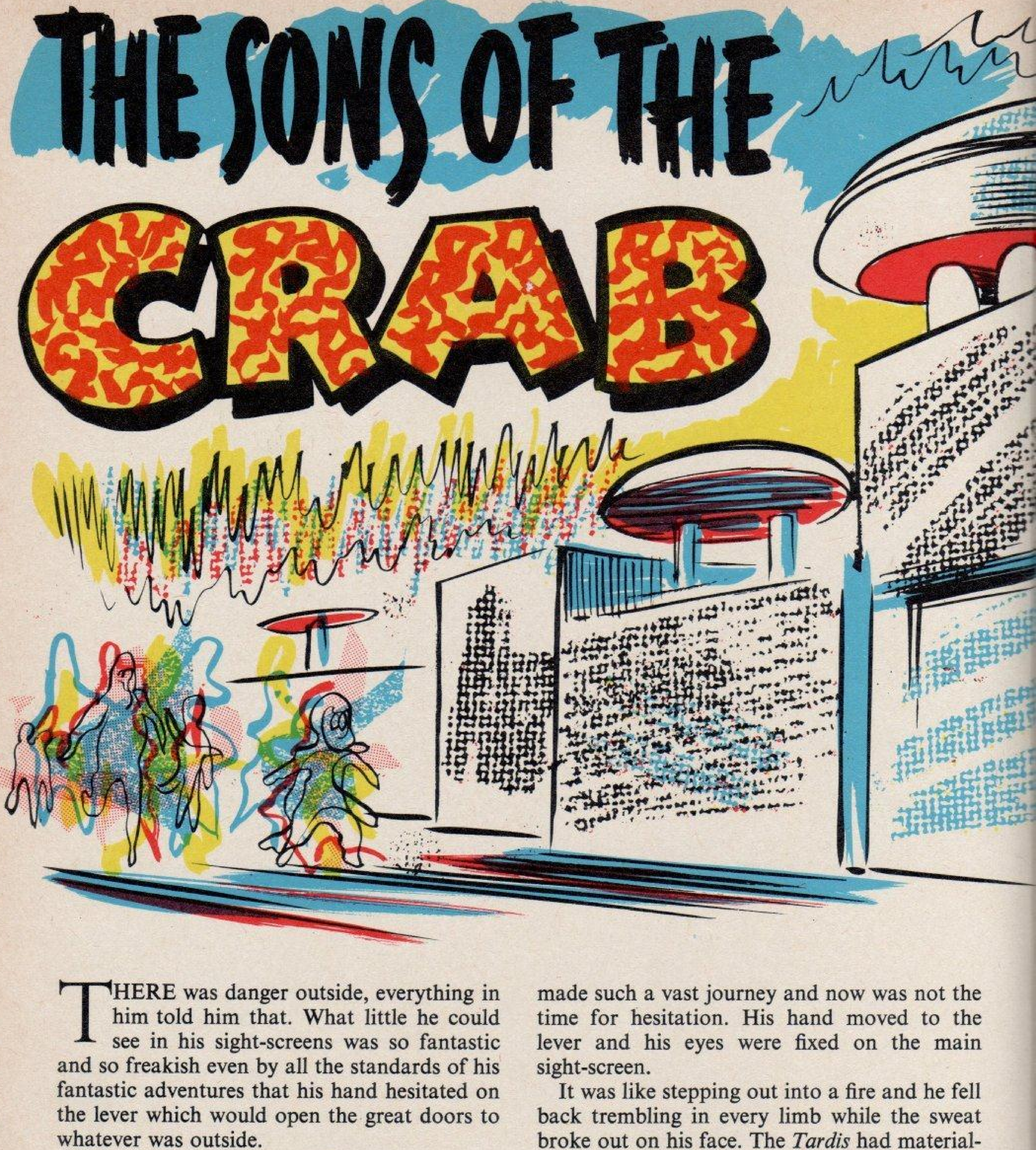
Headlong he passes, in his *Tardis*, through all of Space and all of Time. Where is he going? What is his objective? What goal draws him on through the endless spheres, the millions of ages? No one knows. Perhaps he himself has long forgotten, so distant, in our years, is the time when he first set out on his odyssey. Are his voyages haphazard and merely satisfying the urge to travel everywhere and see everything, or is he seeking something definite? Again, no one knows.

Ceaselessly and restlessly he moves on, along the infinite strands of Energy that criss-cross all Space-Time. There is the deep and always unsatisfied curiosity of the scientist in him. There is the love of all life which fights against its surroundings.

Strange as his many adventures and experiences have been, how strange will be that time and place, no matter how far away or how distant in time, that point, in Infinity-Eternity when, at long last, Dr Who will reach his final goal and find that for which he is searching.



THE SONS OF THE CRAB

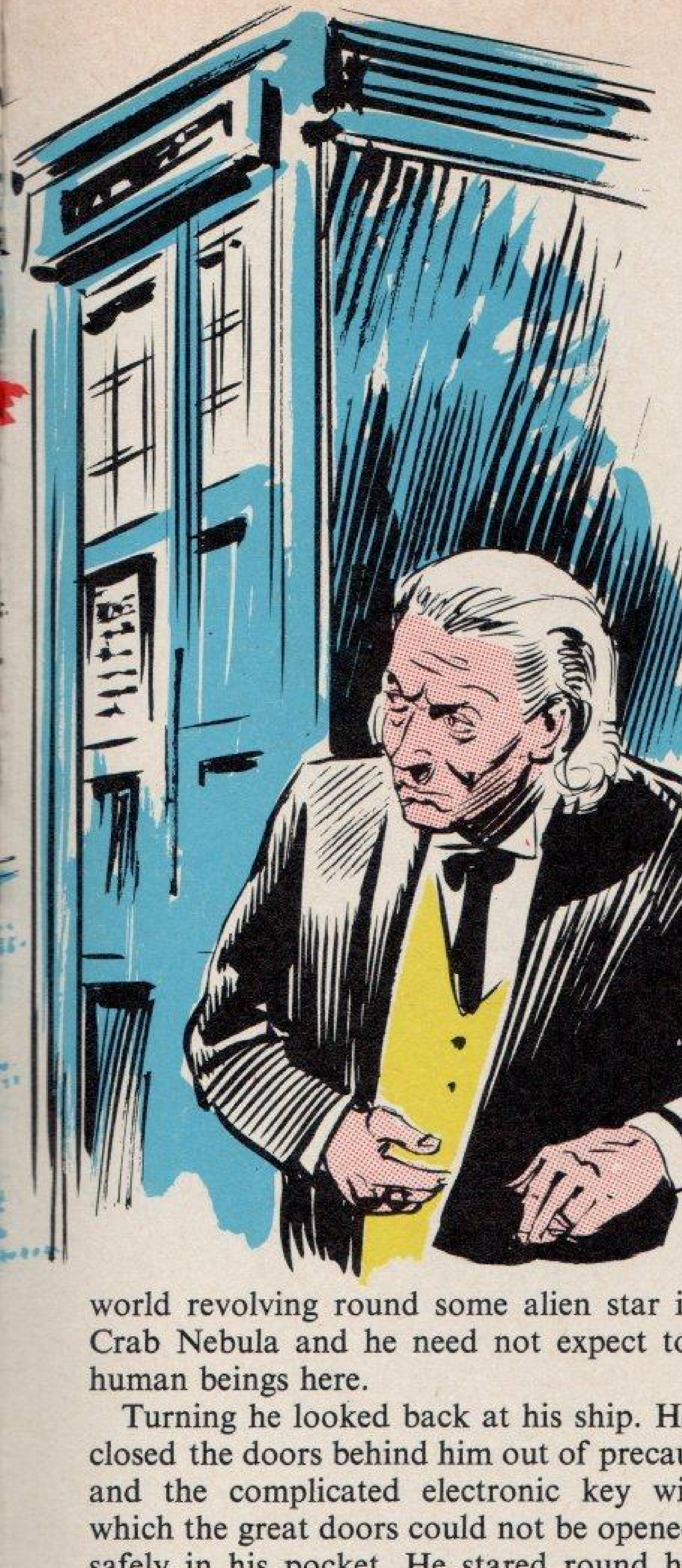


THERE was danger outside, everything in him told him that. What little he could see in his sight-screens was so fantastic and so freakish even by all the standards of his fantastic adventures that his hand hesitated on the lever which would open the great doors to whatever was outside.

But Dr Who had been through too many adventures to feel very much fear. The *Tardis* had brought him further than he had ever been before. If his calculations and instruments were correct, he was now outside the home galaxy of the Milky Way and in an entirely new universe, the universe known to him as the Crab Nebula. It was the first time his space-time ship had made such a vast journey and now was not the time for hesitation. His hand moved to the lever and his eyes were fixed on the main sight-screen.

It was like stepping out into a fire and he fell back trembling in every limb while the sweat broke out on his face. The *Tardis* had materialised in what looked like a normal street in a normal city. But what a difference from any normal city Dr Who had ever visited!

The buildings were low and squat and there were no windows. The structures looked more like blocks of a blackish-grey metal than buildings in which human beings might live. Of course, he reflected to himself, this was a



world revolving round some alien star in the Crab Nebula and he need not expect to find human beings here.

Turning he looked back at his ship. He had closed the doors behind him out of precaution, and the complicated electronic key without which the great doors could not be opened was safely in his pocket. He stared round him in amazement at the crowds of beings thronging the streets and as he stared, his skin crawled again as it had crawled when first he had looked into his sight-screens on landing. A terrible faintness almost overcame him and he leaned against the wall of the nearest building to steady himself. Instantly through all his body shot a current which froze him motionless in the attitude he had been standing in.

Incapable of moving a muscle of his body he stood like a statue while round him surged the crowds in the streets. Horror swept over him again and again as he stood helpless watching the most horrible sight his eyes had ever beheld.

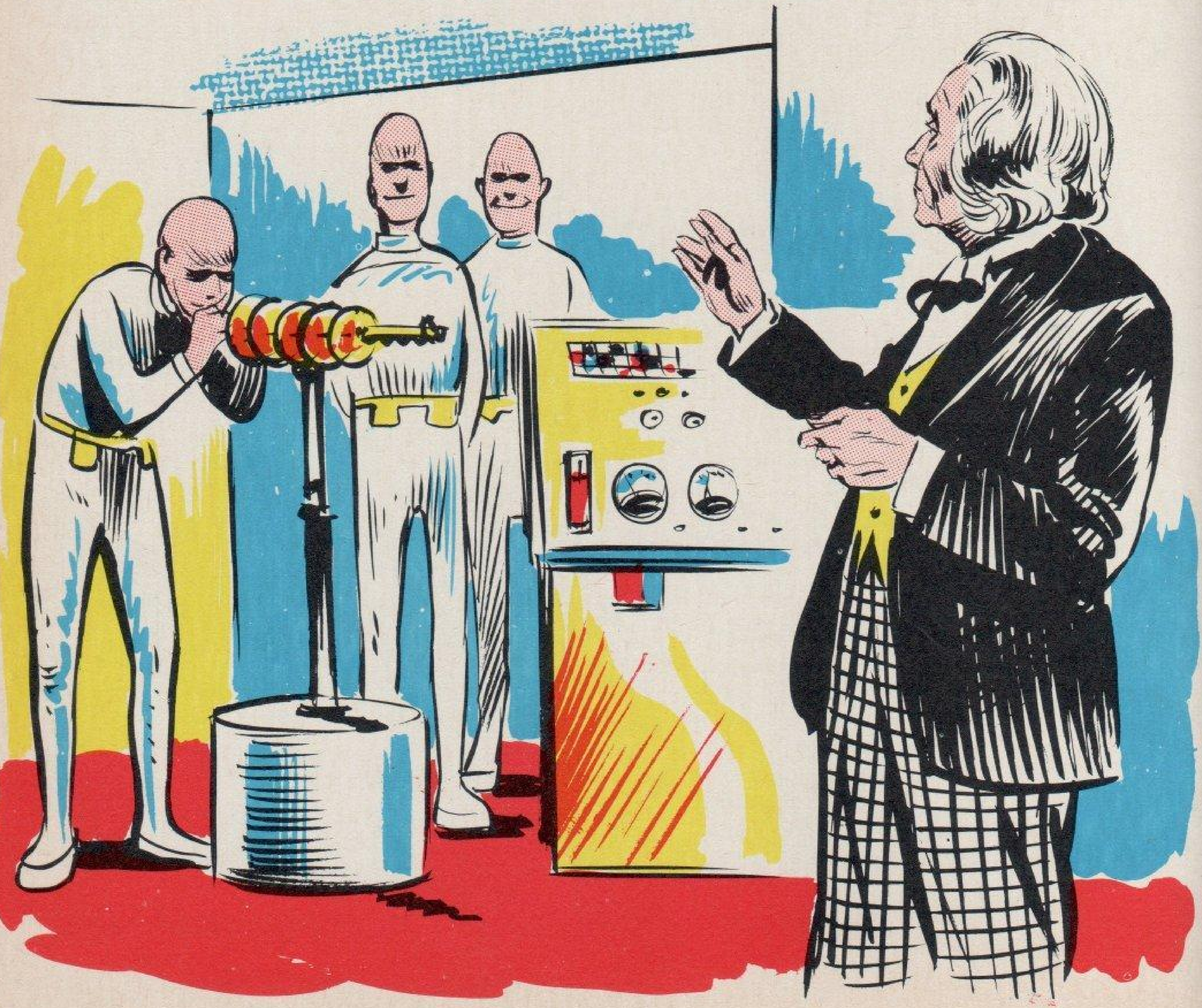
It was like all the nightmares ever experienced. The creatures were of all shapes and sizes, all colours and species. Running through all of them was one faint common likeness. Most of them were like enough to human beings as regards heads and limbs. But there the resemblance ceased. Monsters he had always thought of as huge and as horrible. Horrible enough these creatures were but the horror was of quite another form to anything he had ever experienced in his own galaxy, or indeed on any world. These monsters were not large. These monsters were roughly his own size. There were some whom he glimpsed momentarily who were very like his own form but, as his fascinated gaze froze to them, they changed in a hideous flowing motion which seemed to liquefy the form, into an egg-shaped monstrosity running along on a multitude of limbs and sprouting extra eyes as it scurried along. There were some which grew, apparently at will, into lanky forms twice their normal size. There was one creature which had several heads and limbs growing from its trunk where no limbs should be. There was a file of beings with beaks instead of mouths and claws instead of hands. There were—but his mind began to reel as his eyeballs rolled round while his body held as still as though cast into concrete. He tried to close his eyes and found, to his anguish, that even this was impossible.

They were all around him, rushing and scrambling all over the flat surface between the squat buildings. They seemed to take no notice of him, though once or twice he did see eyes turned in his direction. Then one of them charged straight at him and, inwardly, he almost screamed in a sheer maniac yell of terror. The thing, he could not call it a creature, had three heads, one with the great beaked nose of a vulture, one the head of something that reminded him of a brontosaurus and one that was startlingly human. The body he did not even see, for the expression in the eyes of the third head, mercifully only two in number, held such agony and such fierce horror that it was almost enough to freeze the blood in his veins.

The thing was upon him and he could do nothing as his spirit cringed within him. At two feet from him it slurped into an abrupt change of shape and towered above him as a great flower resembling an earth orchid. Even as his brain registered the image it changed again, this time into a spraying jet of liquid. It ran through a bewildering series of changes during its onrush towards him and then it hit him. A gigantic coruscation of sparks fountained over him, shot with flames and spouts of brilliant light, and then there was nothing. It had all happened in the space of a few earth seconds, while the other creatures milling round him in that flat space between the squat blind buildings had taken not the slightest notice.

His mind was reeling towards merciful oblivion when once again he felt movement. It was not in his own body; that was as rigid as before. But the wall against which he had fallen before the rigidity had seized him was moving towards him. A square of the grey surface opened and a dim light shone out. Almost like a creature frozen into a square block of ice he moved into the building and the wall sealed up again behind him. He rolled his eyeballs round and relief like a warm flood of comforting solace washed round him. He could see human beings, normal human beings who stayed in one shape, who moved and walked like normal human beings, who even laughed like human beings. Soon now he would be released from this bothersome rigidity and able to talk to these inhabitants of this strange world and get an explanation for the enigmatic horrors thronging the street outside. He tried to move his limbs but to his intense irritation they were as rigid and motionless as before.

The men before him were tall and thin and were dressed in tunics of a silvery metallic fabric. They were quite bald and if his face muscles had been able to move they would have made him laugh. He saw one of them move over towards an instrument set on a white pedestal, an instrument somewhat like a small gun, save that its barrel consisted of coils of wire rather than a metal tube. He saw the man



stoop and sight along the wire coils and sudden fright overcame him. This villain was going to shoot him. Then he laughed and this time his face muscles moved. He moved his legs and his arms and his head. He was free again. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and fixed his monocle into his eye. He beamed round on the men surrounding him.

"It's an entirely new one," came a voice to his ears. "You know, Mernogil, this could be a big break-through. You noted, five whole minutes and complete negative reaction. I can't remember when such a thing was ever known before—it never was."

"Don't be too sure, Valkro," said another. "It was outside then. We'll have to run it through the routine tests in here, of course. Only then can we be sure. We can't send up the report until we're quite sure I've known things like this before. Seems to be some sort of thing that attacks them at times, so that they cling to one form longer than you'd think possible. It always breaks down after a very short while. Always has up to now, anyway. Well let's get it over, shall we? Can't waste too much time. You know what they say, they think we're only amusing ourselves if we don't come up with some report or other."

The group laughingly broke up and the doctor stared round him in bewilderment. He took a step forward to grasp the arm of one of the men and came up short against what seemed like an invisible wall. Of course, a force-field. These men were scientists, all his surroundings told him that. They would be cautious of infection against anything coming in from outside, especially from such an outside as he had come. He began to shout and wave his hands but none of them seemed to take the slightest notice of him. They spread out through the large white room and as his eyes followed them in bewilderment, his respect for them grew by leaps and bounds. The place looked like a paradise to him.

There was apparatus round all the white walls, instruments and mechanisms quite unfamiliar to him, although he guessed that their shape only seemed foreign to him and that their uses would be quite easy for him to understand when once he knew their purpose. His own *Tardis* was a glittering small replica of such a place and he sighed with renewed relief as the feeling of once more being amongst friends who would understand him came over him. They might even welcome his coming for surely nothing like the *Tardis* had ever been known in any universe, even in this universe of the Crab Nebula. But their attitude still puzzled him. He remembered that one of them had called him 'it', as though he was an object or at best a brute beast. A small chill came over him as he looked again at their smooth faces and bald heads. All the faces, he now saw, seemed to be completely devoid of any expression. True, they had laughed but he remembered that their laughter had seemed cold and without any mirth, as though it came from a recording machine. He tried once more to walk towards them and speak and found now that he could move. The force-field was down and he trotted across the room towards the two he had heard talking together.

"I say, I say," he began in a loud voice. "Isn't anyone going to welcome me? I've come a very long way, millions of light-years in fact. It's a very strange world you have here and my first experience of it was all very unnerving——"

"All right, all right," said one of them. "Mernogil, you make a start, will you? Run the routine tests over it and try and get a fix on its highest normal index. We don't want to feel happy too soon but have you noticed, it hasn't changed once even in here."

"It talks too, you heard," said Mernogil. "Not so unusual that, but it needs examination. Most of 'em just howl and gibber. Can't remember when we last had a talker in here. Well, here goes. Two of you put it on the stand."

Fuming and shouting Dr Who found himself picked up by a pair of the men and carried struggling towards a low stand like a dais. As they dumped him on it, a railing of white rods shot up from the floor round him so that once again he was a prisoner though this time he could move.

He raged and shouted at them from behind the bars which, as he shook them, held as firm as though a fly's feet were touching them. "Is this any way to treat a visitor?" he yelled. "I'm a scientist, like you people evidently are. I'm human, like you are. What are you doing to me? Let me go."

He stopped as a deep violet beam shot out

from one of the instruments. It bathed him in an eldritch blue glow and from out of it, he saw many of the men staring at him through what looked like large goggles. The violet glow bathed him for a few seconds and then vanished. He heard a sudden gasp as of indrawn breath from the men.

"Quick, quick," said Valkro. "The emboliser. I can't believe my own eyes. Not a flicker out of it, not an organ changed. You saw in the X-ray screens. Rigid, rigid, rigid, the wonder of it. Have we at last found it? Will this day go down in the annals of Wengrol as our day of deliverance? Quick, quick, all of you, we must go through the whole programme before we report to the Chief Yend. We must be quite sure, sure beyond all doubt—you know him—before we even whisper to him of the possibility."

"I say," howled the doctor from his circular prison. "How dare you treat me like a specimen? I am a man, I tell you, a human being like yourselves. What is this nonsense you are ranting?"

And now, at last, it seemed that they listened to him. They gathered round him and their big eyes stared at him out of their smooth faces as though he was a guinea pig in a cage, or a specimen stuck on the viewplate of a microscope. Intense emotion at last began to appear on some of those expressionless faces and the doctor at last began to feel as though his nightmare might be nearing its end when once more its former horror overcame him and he cringed once again against his bars.

Two of the faces peering down at him seemed to run together like warm plastic. The eyes slurped sideways and the nose elongated itself into a trunk. The body changed shape into something like a small dragon in one of them and like a large balloon of flesh in the other. There came a cry of fear from the rest and a call for volunteers. Two came forward and very carefully, using instruments like gripping tongs, they grasped the two writhing shapes and moved them towards a cleared space by one of the walls.

Incredible, Dr Who watched the hideous things writhing and changing even as the tongs held them. The pair holding the tongs yelled out in anger: "Quick, quick, we can't hold them."

Then a square of the wall opened and the two writhing, swirling shapes were thrust out, thrust out into that great scurrying throng of monstrous multi-shapes from which the doctor himself had been so recently dragged. He could not believe his own eyes and he felt drenched in perspiration.

The faces of the men round him were grave and he heard Valkro say to Mernogil: "My own friend one of them was. To think of—Mernogil, it's the new one. It brought it in when we enfolded it. It's human itself but it brought the changing death in with it. Stand clear, everybody. Who'll volunteer for this one. Tests or no tests, it must go out again. We can't run any risks now. Those two were as normal as any of us. They took the tests only recently. It's the contamination. We must get it outside."

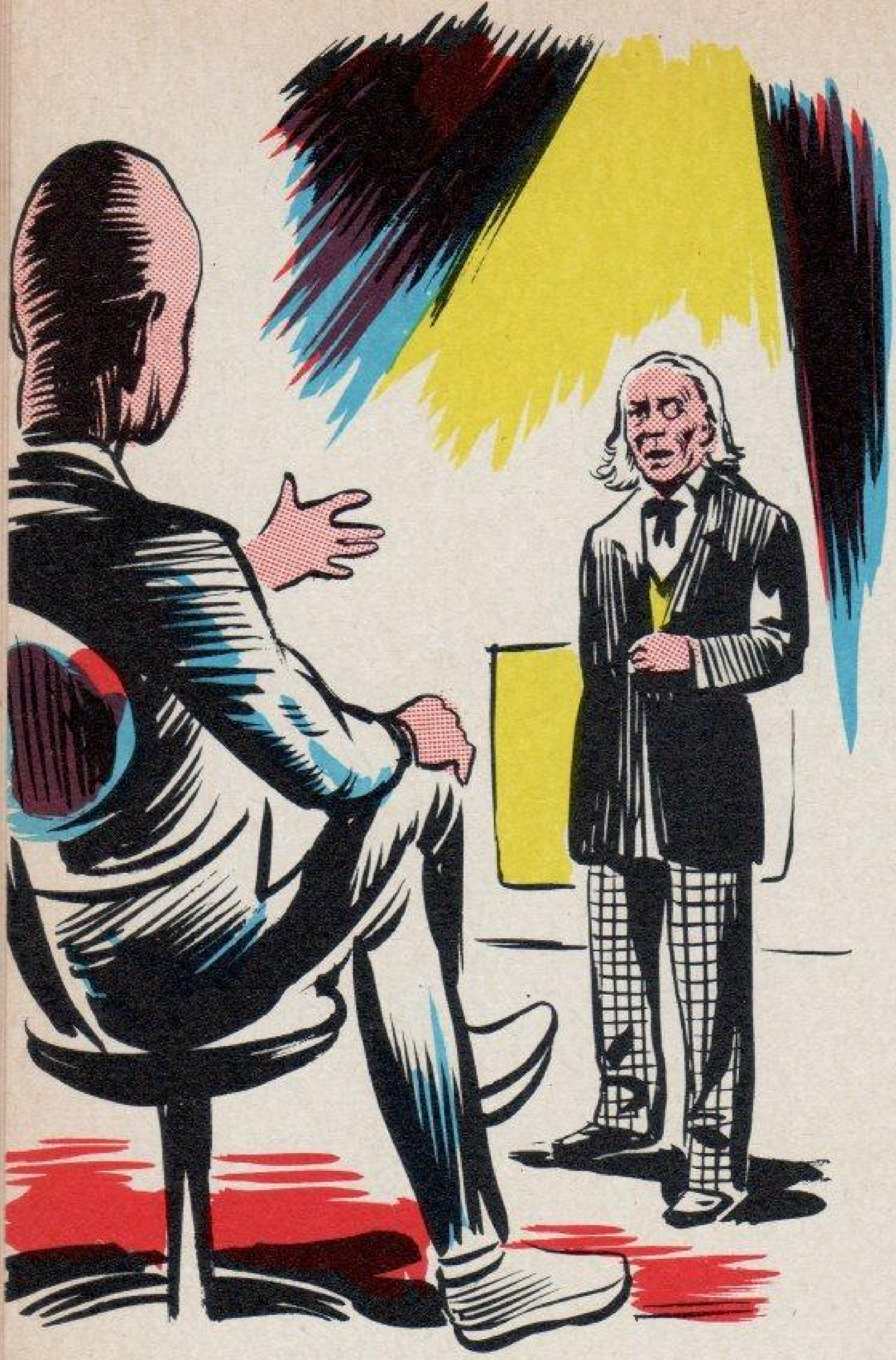
"No, no, Valkro," said Mernogil calmly. "You're letting yourself think irrationally about this creature. This creature is no Yend; he is not native to Yend, he is not like our race at all. He is something quite new and we must take him at once to the Chief Yend. Fomal will know what to do about it."

"But the tests—we haven't completed half of them," protested the other. "We can't take it up to Fomal before——"

Dr Who called out from his barred dais in a loud voice that interrupted Valkro's words. "That's the first sensible thing any of you people have said. I demand to be taken to this Fomal of yours. You have no right to subject me to these indignities."

"Yes, it makes sense," said Mernogil. "The incredible has happened. The Outside has at last bred, amongst an infinity of horrors, something rational. Dangerous of course, obviously. Yes, Fomal must see this. The tests no long matter here. Fomal will want to dissect this one with his own hands. He will want to see with his own eyes into the glands of this creature, to see what the genes have been doing with themselves to produce for the first time in so many centuries a thing once more like a human being."

At the words a cold wave of terror swept over the doctor. They were talking about dissecting him, calmly and coldly as though he was an inanimate thing. His eyes bulged as they went round the room and saw that, in some indefinable way, the men were changing before his eyes. The changes were slight and scarcely noticeable, a slight shifting of the rigid form of one here, a lengthening or a shortening of the



body, and the changes stopped as soon as they began. The heat of the room had already made him sweat and now a cold veil of perspiration covered him and he leaned heavily against the bars, while the nightmare rioted all round him. Then he heard Mernogil shout out.

"Enough of this. We are all intoxicated by this thing. We must all forget what happened. Do you all want to be put outside?"

There was a hush in the vast laboratory and they all stood motionless, curious expressions on their faces. The white bars dropped and Dr Who half fell out of the space they had occupied. Instantly he was held in a vice by an invisible force-field and felt himself moving. He was almost fainting and he never saw the way he went. He came to himself alone in a large room, alone except for one tall figure sitting in a plain chair in front of him. The doctor tried to move and found he was free. He put his monocle into his eye and stared angrily at this new man in front of him. This would be Fomal, the Chief Yend, the leader of those fiendish torturers in the great laboratory. He started in on a furious tirade but the words of the other cut across them.

"I know all that you are thinking," said Fomal coldly and in a voice with scarcely any expression. "Those others, my staff, they are nothing but mechanics, technologists. They know nothing. They did well to bring you to me. I was waiting for you. Turn round, strange creature."

Instinctively the doctor turned and there, standing against the wall was the *Tardis*! He almost sobbed in relief. "You brought my ship inside here! How did you do this? I thought no one or nothing saw me arrive."

"Two such incredible objects close together," said Fomal calmly, "could only have connection each with the other. You call it a *ship*. To me it is nothing but a small box, just large enough to contain one man and with that odd flashing light at its head. It is perhaps a robot or some sort of mechanical servant?"

The doctor preened himself. At least this creature was talking to him and treating him like a rational being. He had an audience at last.

"It is indeed a ship," he said loftily. "It has carried me for many millions of light-years across the empty spaces between the island universes. I have come from a galaxy we call the Milky Way. To us on Earth this planet is what we call the Nebula of the Crab. I made the journey in fractions of a second."

Fomal smiled. "Now, I see it," he said. "You are indeed a new sort of creature but you are still a mutant. Your disease is as great as that of those poor mindless hordes outside, except that your disease is of the mind. My staff were quite right. You will be dissected and we will see what goes on inside you. It is possible, yes, it is quite possible that you may be able to add some small items of knowledge to our weary search."

"You are talking nonsense, Chief Yend," said the doctor firmly. Alone with this creature, no matter how powerful he was, he could not feel the same terror as he had felt in the laboratory with the others. "I am a rational man, like yourself. I am a visitor to your world."

"One thing only puzzles me," put in Fomal. "You have maintained the rigidity of form you hold ever since you were first detected in our city. Tell me, how do you do this? What drugs do you use? Where have you been hiding in Wengrol all these years, for I can see that you are not a young man. Why have the detectors of my city and of all the other cities of Wengrol, wherever you may have been, not been able to observe you?"

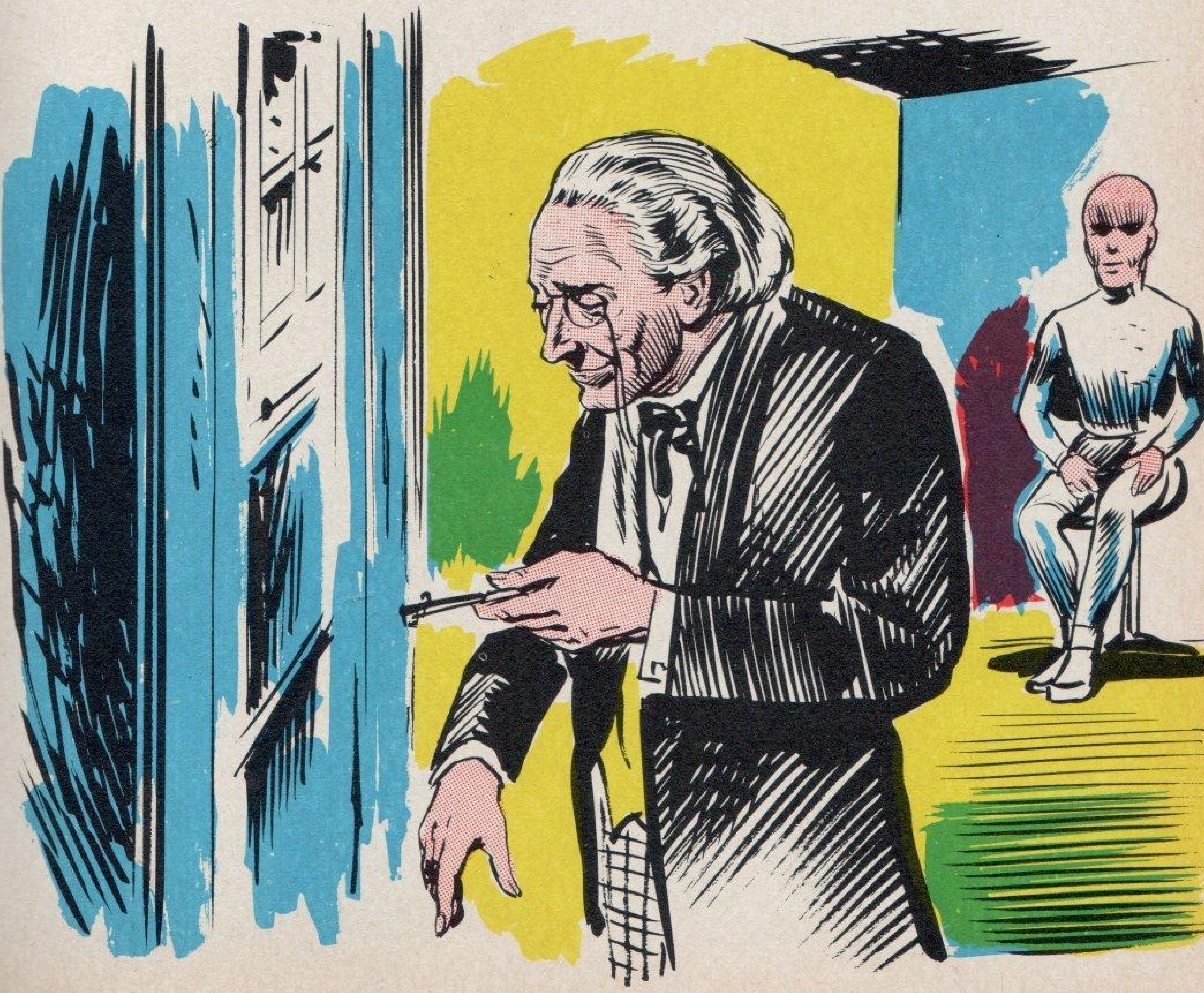
"I tell you I am alien to your world," fumed the doctor impatiently. "I use no drugs to maintain my form, as you so absurdly put it. I have never been on Wengrol before."

The Chief Yend was staring into his own eyes and Dr Who saw in Fomal's eyes the dawn of some small belief. But there was obviously a great force of native disbelief to fight the growing belief. All at once the doctor made up his mind. Reaching into his pocket he drew out the electronic key and moved towards the *Tardis*. The Chief Yend made no move to stop him nor did any of the very irritating force-fields hinder him.

"I will try to convince you," he said firmly. "I will convince you that my *Tardis* is indeed a ship, a vehicle capable of instantaneous motion in both space and time. Look," and, inserting the key, he allowed the electronic impulses to turn the tumblers in the lock. The great doors opened and the glittering lights from within shone out into the room. If he had hoped to overawe the Chief Yend he was bitterly disappointed. Fomal made no motion to rise.

"So far I agree you are right," he observed mildly. "Electronic gadgets! But I am a biologist and such things do not interest me. Wengrol is a large enough world for such a gadget to have been made. To me it proves nothing of what you say."

Exasperated, the doctor stood nonplussed, staring at the Chief Yend. As he stared, a totally incredible thing happened to his vision. Sitting in the chair opposite him was no longer Fomal, the smooth-faced Chief Yend of this world of



Wengrol. Instead, his fevered vision thought that he was looking at a weird monstrosity with multiple eyes and arms, with claws instead of feet. For a micro-second the thing was there, then Dr Who shook his head and Fomal was back.

Was he going mad?

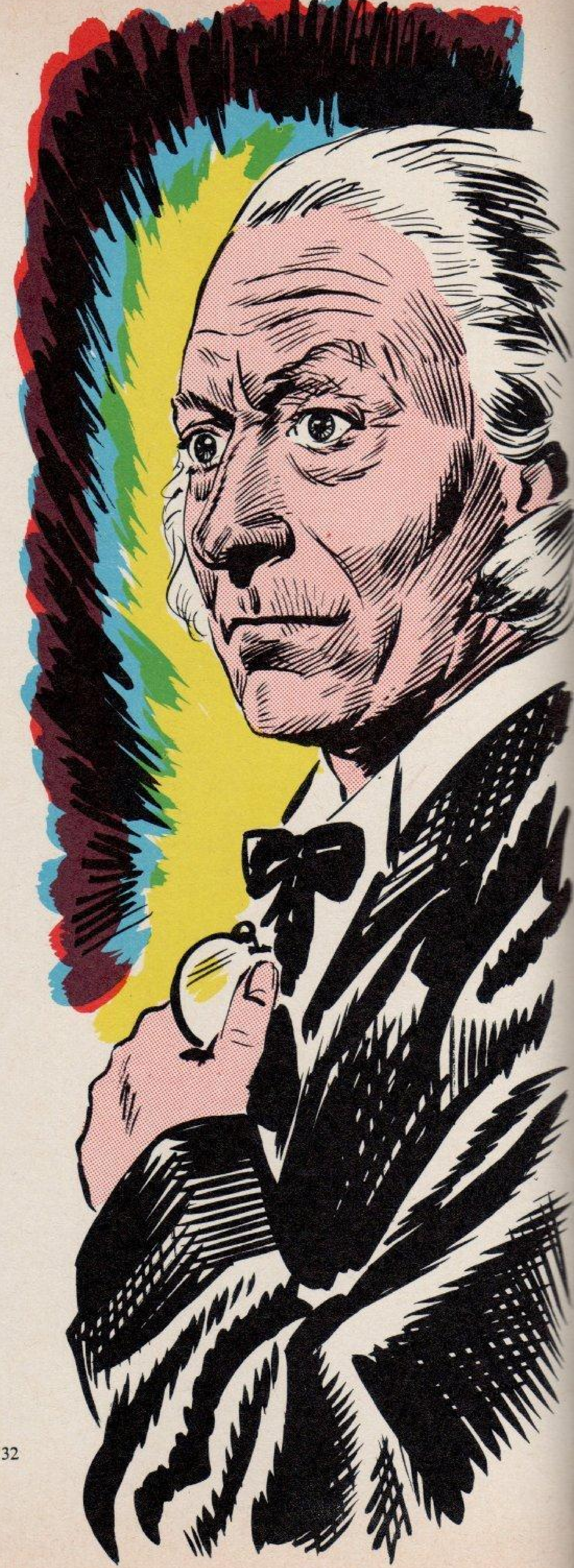
But his flesh crawled as he saw that it was not the complete and original Fomal but that the flesh of the limbs swirled here and there like heavy oil and then became the solid flesh he had seen before.

"It happens at times," observed Fomal heavily. "I take great precautions naturally but it is highly depressing. No living man has ever seen it before. It is the stress of the emotion at hearing your words that unmanned me. Fortunately, my control is very great. And, after all, I cannot regard you as a living man, can I? You are really nothing but a laboratory specimen, a curiosity to be examined in every molecule, so that any small knowledge we may gain from your carcass may be added to the formidable knowledge we already possess but which, alas, has brought us seemingly not an inch closer to our objective."

"You—you——" the doctor fought for words. "You changed shape! The thing is incredible. It is——" He stopped. Ever since his first sight of life on this world he had seen nothing but this constant and horrifying changing of shape. In his mind, he searched for all that he knew of biology and heredity, of genes and chromosomes, of glands.

"Of course," said Fomal distantly. "I regret the incident. Now, to return to yourself. It has been reported to me that not once since we brought you in, and to my own senses since you were brought before me, has your shape changed, not even by the faintest flicker. Now, to me, this is a far greater marvel than this commonplace vehicle of yours. Electronics to me is mere mechanics. Any man with knowledge and tools can make any object possible within the physical universe. It is material and everything material waits to be discovered. But biology is another matter. Centuries ago we of Wengrol devoted ourselves exclusively to the science of life. How well we succeeded you have seen with your own eyes."

A great bitterness in the voice struck Dr Who. The creature before him was not looking at



him but seemed to be staring into far distances. He went on speaking almost as though he was alone.

"Who has succeeded better than we?" he murmured. "Who has made a world of monsters? Who has bred an infinite number of shapes and forms, all . . . all . . . all of them horrors and nightmares?"

"I'm afraid I can't understand a word you're saying, sir," said Dr Who stiffly. "To me this is all arrant nonsense. You will kindly explain all this to me, sir. I have been living with horror ever since I was so rudely dragged into that laboratory of yours. I insist on some sort of an explanation."

Fomal looked at him with gleaming eyes. "It is true then? It is true that rigidity of shape is your natural form. The norm of humanity is preserved in your genes? Such a thing has never been known for all the centuries since evil Mortain came, bringing with it new and more sinister radiations than our biologists in their most fiendish moments had ever produced. Tell me, creature, before I find out for myself with the electronic scalpel, where in Wengrol were you born? You are a unique marvel. For centuries no creature like yourself has been seen."

Dr Who drew himself up in dignity. "I absolutely refuse to bandy words with you any more, sir. You will not believe my simple statement, so further discussion is useless between us. I have stayed too long in this nightmare world. I will now leave you, sir, leave you to your nightmares and your horrors, of which I have had more than enough."

He walked at a dignified pace towards the open door of the *Tardis*. He heard a slight laugh from behind him and, exasperated beyond measure, he felt himself once more confronted with one of their force-fields.

"Not so fast, creature," said the Chief Yend pleasantly. "You cannot leave us yet, nor ever maybe. A new thought has come into my mind. We will speak of it later. Now, I will tell you. I believe what you have said. It must be so. Your own constant rigidity of form is its own proof. There is no creature in Wengrol like you. Tell me, in your world, are all creatures like you are?"

"Of course," snapped the doctor. "How else should they be? Men breed men and donkeys breed donkeys. Your question is absurd. The laws of heredity are quite plain and clear. No creature in my world—or in any world I have ever visited—grows larger or taller than the norm of its species. No creature grows more limbs or eyes than his species demands."

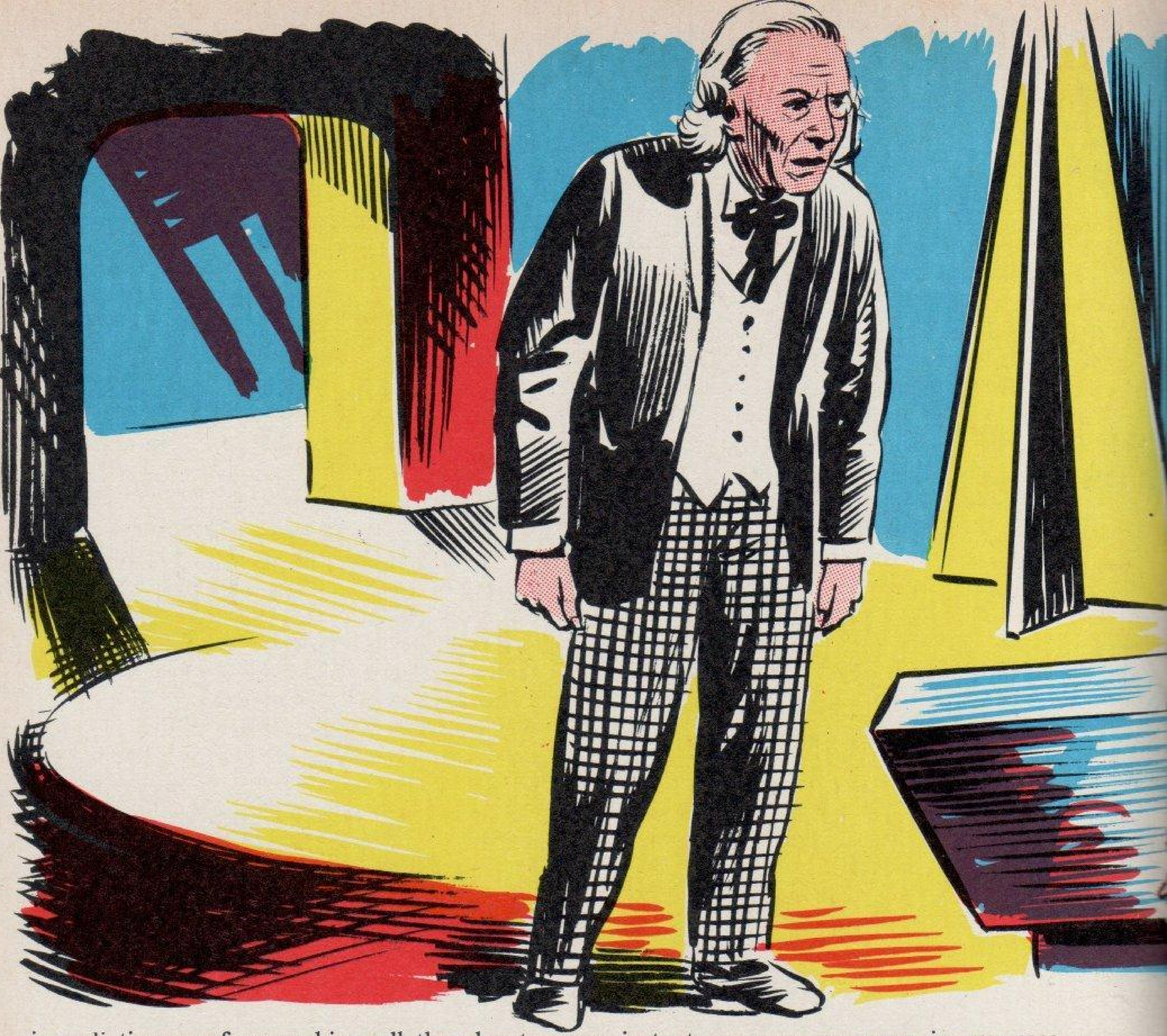
"You have no mutants—no mutations in form, then?" pursued Fomal keenly and the doctor started.

"Such things have been known," he said cautiously. "We have known mutations of form over long periods, but not the lightning swift changes, the horrible frantic forms that happen here. Are you trying to tell me that the things I have seen here are the results of mutations brought about by strange radiations?"

"By the star Mortain," replied Fomal simply. "It swam into our system of planets centuries ago and it brought with it many new and more powerful radiations which acted directly on the germ-plasms of all the species on all the planets of our system so that—what you have seen . . . but I go too far. It was not only Mortain's baleful eye that made us what we are. We, the biologists, are also greatly guilty. We had commenced to experiment with species. We planned to make new kinds of beings, improvements on the standard; new and unimaginable animals and new men, new men with organs and powers we only dreamed of. Then Mortain came and made nonsense of all our experiments. Chaos broke loose all over Wengrol. The biologists built themselves these leaden cities. All over our globe, they contain biologists and scientists and technicians who are searching for the norm of living once more, the norm once so wickedly and unthinkingly tossed away by our foolish ancestors. Nature runs riot on Wengrol, strange creature from beyond our stars. Cruel, ruthless Nature, heated by Mortain's baleful light, continues with her endless experiments and we fight her now, endlessly and fruitlessly. Until you came."

"Until I came!" the doctor repeated. "What can I do for you? I know little of biology—in my worlds we took all that for granted. Our mutations, if favourable, took generations to come. What can I do for you? Is there nowhere you can escape to?"

"There is nowhere in the universe we know of," replied Fomal calmly. "We have visited,



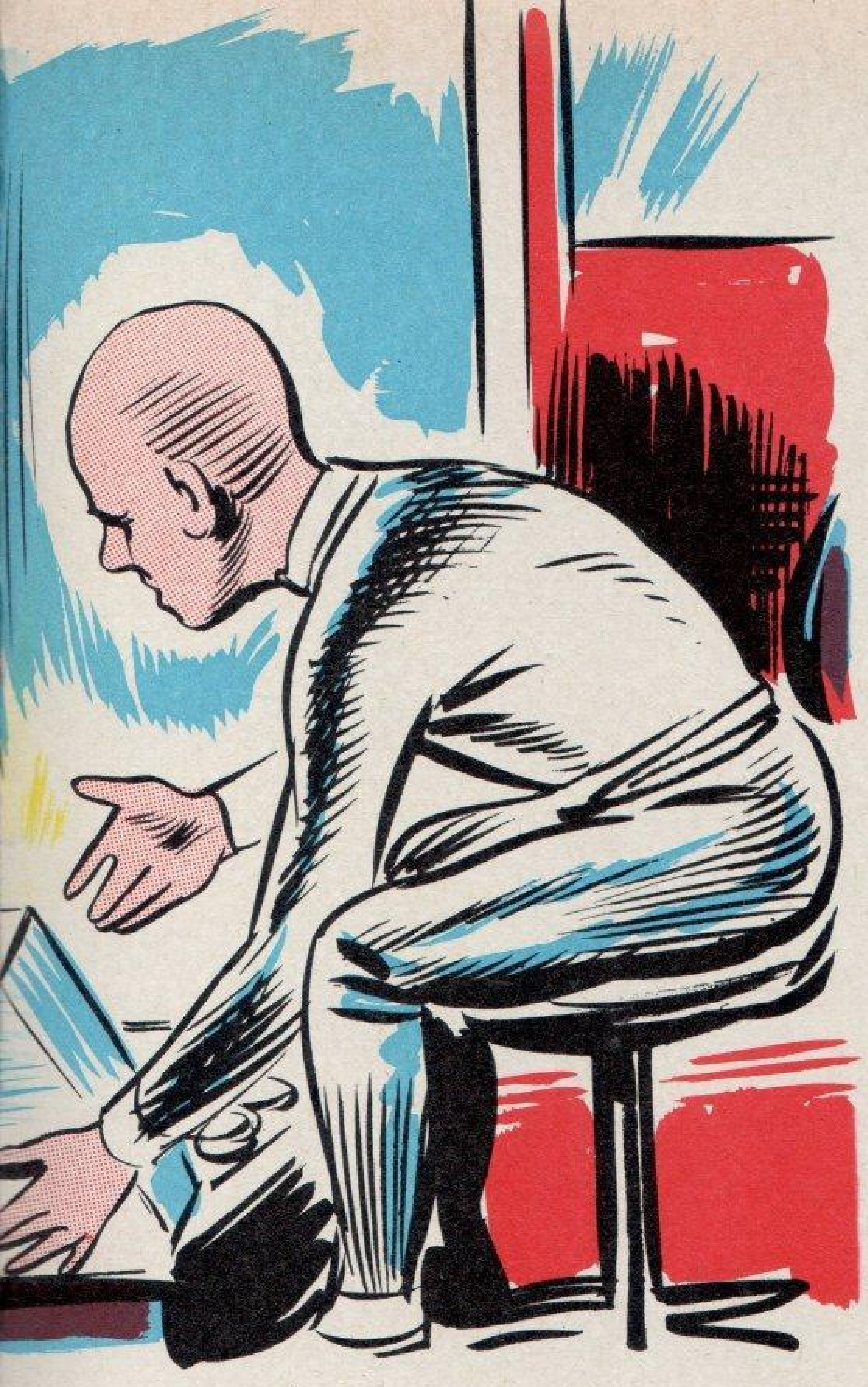
in radiation-proof space-ships, all the planets of our system and every one is much the same as Wengrol is. There is nowhere the Yends can fly to and hide from the horrors we have made."

"Those creatures outside there," put in the doctor. "Do they know? Do they suffer by knowing what they are?"

Fomal looked at him strangely. "We do not know," he said heavily. "Some think they do, some maintain they are mindless. We have seen into the eyes of some of our specimens and have seen things we would rather not remember. The whole life of our planet is concentrated in finding once again the normal germ-plasm. We have it in our laboratory but it proves quite useless. The radiations of Mortain can seep through even our strongest radiation-proof walls and each and every test-tube only produces a man or a woman who can degenerate in an instant—as you saw even in my case—without warning. We have developed drugs that will halt it but only temporarily and not permanently."

"Then your position is truly hopeless," said the doctor stiffly. "I cannot see why you hold me here. In common humanity you must let me escape from this cauldron of horrors. I have been here too long as it is. Already my body may have absorbed enough radiation from this star to make me like yourselves."

"No, no, have no fear of that," muttered Fomal. "You are not young any more. The germ-plasm must be mutated very young. You have nothing to fear. You will not be long with us. There is one thing you must do for us. It is something we cannot do for ourselves. There are many amongst us who feel that all our efforts will be unavailing, that our first



meddlings with Nature, followed by the coming of Mortain, have struck too deep at the fundamental structure of life in our system, and cannot now ever hope to be reversed. We would not see the end of our species. Somewhere in the great universe there may be a new home for us. You will take us there, strange creature?"

"Take you there!" Dr Who repeated stupidly. "Take how many of you? My *Tardis* cannot hold that many. Also, how can I take creatures like yourself out into the sweet, clean universe where life is stable and normal. If you would force me to do that, indeed you must be the most degenerate and depraved monster ever spawned."

Fomal laughed thinly. "You do me less than justice, stranger. Well we know that we, the living, cannot ever leave Wengrol. We have made our bed and we must lie on it. But our children can go. Our sons and our daughters can go and leave for ever behind the nightmare of the world into which they were generated."

He leaned down and lifted up a casket. Opening it, he displayed to the wondering eyes of Dr Who racks and racks of small glass test-tubes. Leaning down, his senses reeled. In each tube hung suspended in liquid a tiny human form, a miniature of the normal human form.

"Test-tube birth," he repeated woodenly and Fomal laughed.

"One of our successful experiments. I gather that in your world this was not so."

"It was a dream," muttered Dr Who, "the dream of some of our scientists."

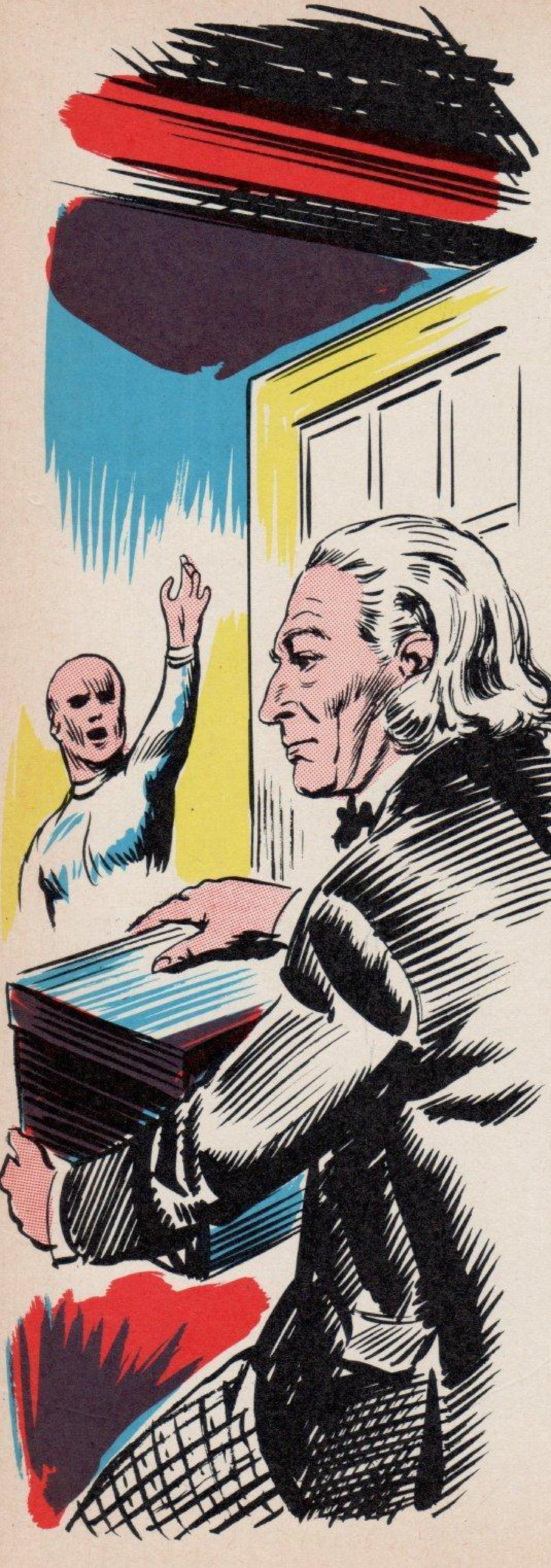
"A dream our biologists made true," said Fomal sadly. "And our first and greatest mistake. From this sprang all our other hideous experiments in tampering with the germ-plasm. There are a hundred human embryos in this casket, fifty male and fifty female. Take them, strange man of the—what was it?—the Milky Way, and plant them in some alien world, some world not racked and tormented by stars like Mortain, some world where once again the mighty race of the Yends may regain its former glory."

"And you others?" said the doctor throwing out his hand.

"We will remain," said the Chief Yend sadly. "We will remain to mortify the flesh of our world, we will remain to our endless and hopeless task of trying to put the clock back. You will do this thing?"

Dr Who stood fighting it out in his own mind. He was a prisoner here and only by agreeing could he escape. There seemed to be no choice for him. But the thing itself might carry its own horrors. His flesh had crawled at sight of those tiny manikins suspended in the liquid of the test-tubes. What horrors might he be spreading into the universe if he took them to a new world? But his indecision was broken by a new thing, by a loud babble of voices and the trampling of many feet, many paws, many tentacles. The doors of the room swung open and a great horde of mutants burst in. Mernogil was at their head and already his face was sliding into a grotesque caricature of humanity.

"They have burst in through a specimen-hole," he cried. "They are pouring in at all the openings. We can do nothing to stop them. We



also ourselves can no longer maintain our rigidity. I am degenerating as I speak——" The mouth flowed downwards into the chest and one eye remained, staring with agonised terror out at a world to which it was saying farewell.

Stupidly, Dr Who stood cringing from the multitude of horrors clamouring into the room. Afterwards, he could mercifully no longer recall many of them. The human mind has only so much capacity for fear; when this is reached it retreats and knows no more. He felt the Chief Yend pulling at his arm.

"You are free," he yelled. "Into your ship. It is too late now to do what I asked."

Like an automaton Dr Who walked into the *Tardis* and stood looking out again. The horde of mutated monsters was milling round the room mindlessly and gibberingly. Fomal stood with the casket held in his arms.

"Give me your sons and your daughters," cried Dr Who. "I will take them away from here and will give them a chance to grow into the sweet form of humanity. Throw the casket to me."

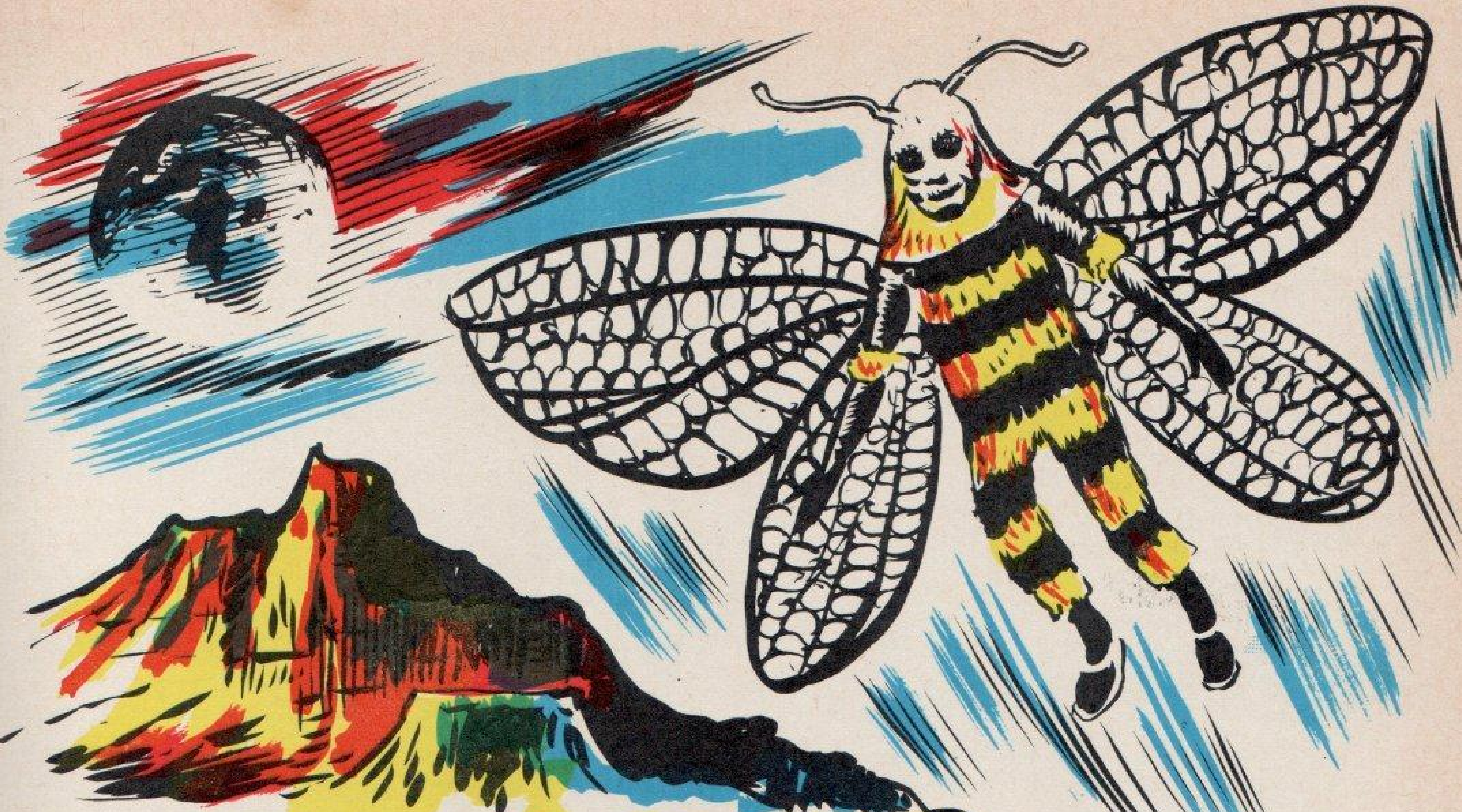
A light of happiness came into Fomal's sombre eyes and he threw the casket towards the doctor, who caught it as the great doors closed. His last sight was of Fomal being overwhelmed by a mob of the mutations and being trampled to the floor.

In the greyness between the dimensions, Dr Who set the casket on a table and opened it. Wonderingly, he took out one test-tube and held it up to the light. The sons and daughters of the Crab?

The embryo hung there in the liquid, obviously quite dead. Grey and shrivelled and lifeless. He looked at all the others. Not one in the hundred had survived the transition. Either that or the baleful radiations of the star Mortain had become, in some unknown way, necessary for the germ-plasm to survive.

His mind went back to that room on Wengrol. Fomal, the Chief Yend, had been a great man, of a great species which had made the supreme mistake of taking into its own hands, the instruments which only the mighty and everlasting fingers of Nature can manipulate.

Nature looked after her own. No creature thwarted her purposes. Each sphere was within itself for ever. The Sons and the Crab would not survive. Their first mistake had been the last.



THE LOST ONES

THE first breath he took in left him gagging and gasping like a fish out of water, he found time to think. He leaned weakly against the great door of the *Tardis,* his lungs dragging up the breath like a man in a vacuum. Then, with a titanic struggle, he managed to close the door and retreat again into his vehicle.

"Dear me," he croaked, when once again in the normal atmosphere of his ship. "This is a problem indeed. A most inhospitable world this one promises to be. A most unfortunate choice my instruments have made this time. Now, what shall I do?"

Any ordinary mortal would have sealed the doorway and fled away from that planet. But Dr Who was no ordinary mortal. Fate, and his *Tardis* had flung him into this sphere and he must see and experience all that it had to offer. Fortunately the problem was not too difficult to solve.

"The Atmospheric Density Jackets," he crooned to himself as he made his way to his vast laboratory and store-room. "I little thought when I invented the things that they would save my own life. I remember well. It was by the purest chance the idea came to me. I remember thinking to myself—what if some accident deprived me of air of sufficient density in the ship. It was easy enough, of course . . . but here am I wasting time again. I must get one of the things right now."

He strapped the waistcoat-like apparatus over his shoulders and reactivated the great door. This time he was able to breathe normally and now he had time to take in his surroundings.

His view from his sightscreens had been very vague, obscured by what looked like driving mists.

He did not at once think of the landscape as a 'nightmare' landscape, for most of the weird planets on which the *Tardis* had flung him could be called that. It was strange, true enough, but that he expected. But there were features here that were beyond mere strangeness. There was that electric sparkle in the sky concentrating above his head like a giant aurora borealis in the sky. The aurora on Earth was at the Pole, but where he was now was altogether too warm to be the polar regions of this planet. Then there were the myriads of sparkling motes he could see in the sky. All this, and the thin atmosphere, presented a series of puzzles waiting to be solved.

He walked out on to what looked like a plain of stone. Everywhere round him were towering pinnacles of what looked like basaltic rock, but pure white in colour and looking startlingly as though they had been carved by hand. He swept his eyes round the tops of them and stood transfixed. Something had moved up there! He stood quite still, breathing deeply like a deep-sea diver, his eyes alert everywhere round him.

He had no weapons on him and suddenly he was conscious of the strangest sensation. He felt just as though dozens of pairs of eyes were looking down on him. Into his brain came a sound like a jumble of voices, speaking and shouting. Dazedly he shook his head and the sounds died. But in their place he heard a new sound, a noise as of millions of crickets chirping. It seemed to come from far away and it rose and fell in pitch until there came a moment when it rose so high that it was beyond range of his hearing. He gave a great shudder and shook himself irritably. What was all this? Was there something behind those rocks watching him?

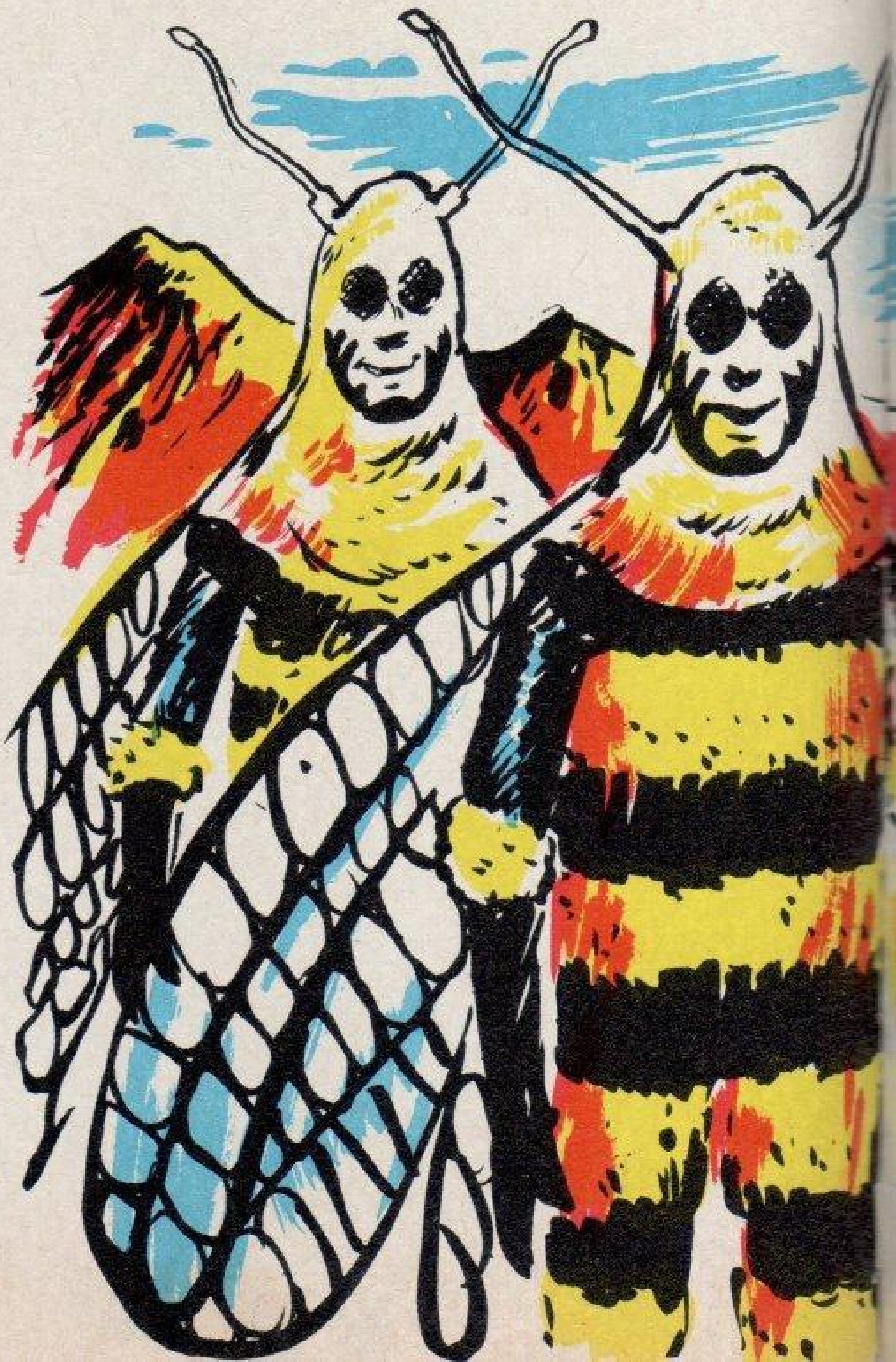
Arms out like a sleep-walker he began to walk away from the basalt rocks. A small part of his mind still struggled, but it was as though he had lost control of his own body and was being guided or drawn to an unknown destination. Thus he was an easy prey to the attack.

His eyes were closed when they swooped down on him and took him, but he knew that a large dome of transparent crystal was put over his head. Immediately his brain cleared and he was himself again. But he was no longer alone. He reeled back, aghast, and wondered if he was dreaming. For what he was seeing was just not possible.

Some of them were still descending, folding their huge transparent wings as their feet touched ground. Others were holding him tightly enough in their small furry hands, which gave him goose-flesh by their mere contact. Angrily he thrust off their grasp and they drew back.

"Be off with you," he growled. "How dare you handle me like that, you great big . . . great big . . . overgrown butterflies. . . ."

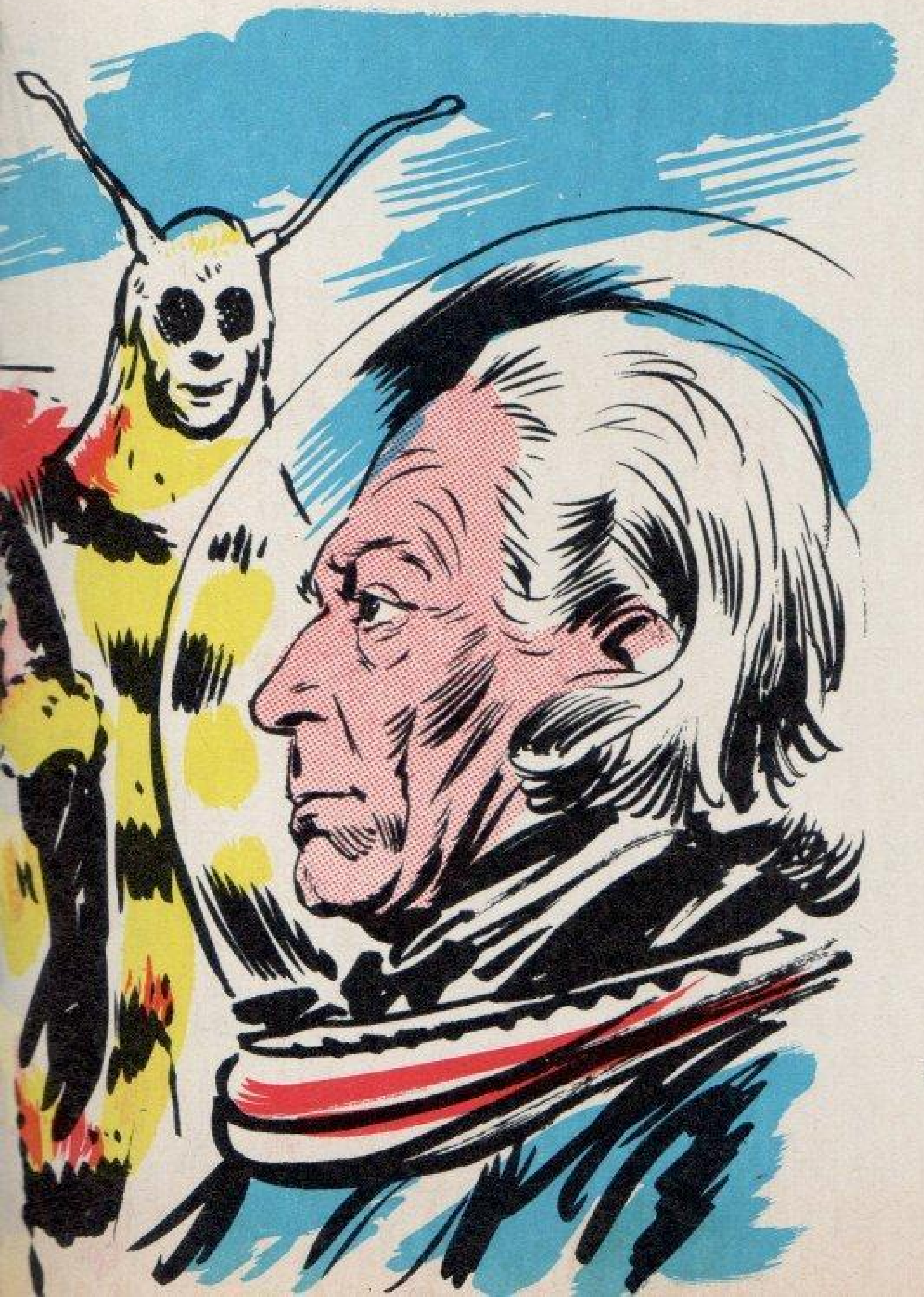
Angry as he was and mightily scared too, the doctor could not hold back a chuckle at his very apt description of his captors. For they were really extraordinarily like butterflies. Or wasps, whichever way you looked at them. About his own height, they were covered all over with soft fur, in a striped pattern of yellow and black, like wasps. But from their heads protruded a pair of antennae, just like those of butterflies. Their eyes, now he could see properly, were the compound eyes of the insect world, the many-faceted large eyes of all true insects. He suppressed a shudder, for he did not



like insects. And when it came to insects six feet tall, well, that was something altogether too horrible to contemplate. His skin crawled as he saw their tiny hands like claws of a bat, reaching out to him, to grasp him and bear him away.

"We save you from the cruelty of the Zarbi," came a soft voice in his ear. "But do not rejoice. We save you for our own purposes. We have many of our people to avenge from your death-dealing engines. Never before have we captured one of your species. Like your companions who prey on us, your skeleton seems to be hidden inside your body. This is strange to us who wear our skeletons in the carapace about our bodies. We will find out what form of life you are by taking you apart and discovering the secrets of your anatomy. Perhaps when we have done that some of our wise ones will be able to develop some weapon to destroy all of you once and for all. We have enough troubles of our own without the interference of aliens."

Sweat broke out on the doctor's skin as he realised the sense of the words. What hell had he rushed into now? These creatures seemed to be actually proposing to *dissect* him, to take him apart alive so that they could see how he 'worked' just as a watchmaker takes apart a watch. The idea was absurd! He sweated again. These creatures, these beings, these things, might just be able to do that very thing. They were big, they could fly, they had a technology of some sort, as witness the crystalline helmet-like object they had put over his head to eliminate that mysterious 'call' that had made him move like a zombi without will of his own. They prated of his skeleton being inside his body. What nonsense was that? Of course . . . he should have realised at once. These creatures were *insects*! Despite their size they were insects. They had an exo-skeleton, a hard carapace with a furry surface, which was the framework of their bodies. They had the compound eyes of the insect. They had the cold, eerie touch of the cold-blooded insect world. The very flesh on his scalp crawled.



Angrily he shook himself. Was this a time to indulge in vague scientific musings? This was a time for action. He must escape from these loathsome creatures before it was too late. He would not take any chances. Perhaps they did have, somewhere close at hand, some weird scientific laboratory with a dissecting-table. . . .

"You will feel nothing," said the voice again. "We Menoptera are not a cruel people. We would not willingly give pain to any creature. We act only in self-defence. You slaughtered our people and we must find out all about you so that we may work out some form of defence."

"I've done you no harm," chattered Dr Who from a dry mouth. "Why, I've never even seen any of you before. I have only just arrived on your planet this very minute. How could I have harmed you? How could I have slaughtered any of your people?"

"You waste your breath," came the reply. He could scarcely tell which of the creatures was speaking, for their mask-like faces were covered with fur. "It is useless to lie to us. You, or some other of your fellow-creatures, have killed several of my people. You are evidently so very different in species from the deadly Zarbi that I must forget my first thought which was that you were allies of our enemy. On the dissecting table we will learn all about you, how you live, where you come from, and what your purpose is on Vortis."

The doctor looked longingly back at his ship, as closing in on him, they hustled him gently across the stone platform. They didn't touch him now with their little hands, but the pressure of their cold soft bodies was very repulsive to him and the faint smell of musk surrounding them almost intoxicated him. Then he was thrust through a cave mouth into the rock and along a dimly lit passage into a great cavern where there were more of the creatures, engaged in various tasks. Obviously they were taking him before their leader.

Exactly what he had expected he did not know, but this place was very different from anything he had imagined. This was no great technological laboratory. It was the merest rough cave, dimly lighted by what looked like glow-worms. The tasks at which the creatures were occupied bore no resemblance to any human activity. He felt trapped and revolted. In here with these huge insects, determined to torture and eventually kill him, fear almost overcame him.

One of the creatures stood in front of him and Dr Who saw that it must be this one who had spoken to him before. There was no expression on the furry face but the many-faceted eyes gleamed oddly.

"It is true that you have no weapons," came the voice. "That is odd, for the others of your kind we have seen, some with our dying eyes, have indeed carried powerful weapons. Tell me, who are you and where have you come from?"

"I am from the planet we know as Earth," replied the doctor firmly. "Until I have consulted my instruments and my star-maps I cannot tell you where Earth is in relation to this planet of yours which you call Vortis. Earth may not even be in the same galaxy as Vortis for all I know. I have travelled through the dimensions and landed here, in the middle of some private war, it seems. Who are these Zarbi you speak of? Who are the Menoptera? And who, above all else, are the invisible people you say are like me? I can assure you that I arrived quite alone and that none of my people are on your planet. For what reason would we come here. This seems a most desolate world of mists and rocks and with strange lights in the sky and weird noises all round. Where I come from there is sunlight and green things. There are beasts and birds and . . ." he grinned sardonically, ". . . there are creatures like you are, many, many, different species of them. But all of them are tiny, and none can talk. None of them is as huge as you creatures are."

"That, of course, is a lie," came the reply. "We are insects and we talk. What do you mean by tiny and huge?"

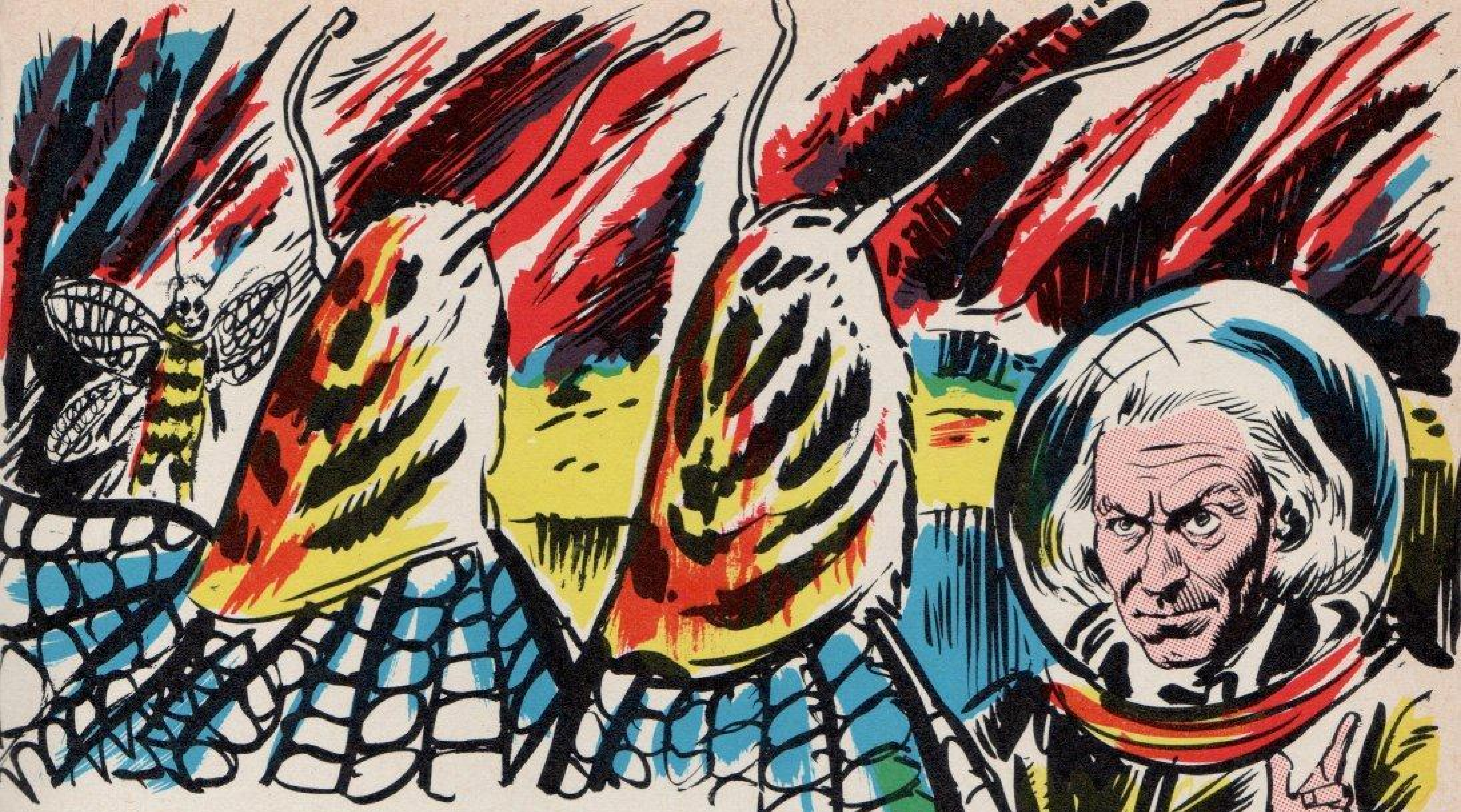
Dr Who was momentarily surprised. Of course these creatures did not think of themselves as of a certain size. Butterflies on Earth, if they thought at all, would not think of themselves as tiny, would they? He furrowed his brow. How could he start to explain the whole concept of the relationship of all created things with all other created things? At any rate this was passing the time away, precious time in which anything might happen. "Some time I will explain to you about the universe," he said. "I will tell you of the infinite number of forms which life has taken on many, many worlds. But not now. I demand that before anything else you answer my questions. If you will not, I must go back to my ship. I have wasted enough of my valuable time already."

His blustering voice seemed momentarily to cow the creature before him, as he had intended it to do. He had seen no weapons among them and, now that he had time to look round him, he saw that there were really very few of the creatures in the cavern, perhaps thirty in all. It was true, they could fly and, big as they were, they might share some of the quite startling speeds and agility of many insects on Earth. But he felt a returning confidence that if he handled this situation right, all might yet turn out well.

"It can do no harm," the reply came to him in the soft voice. "We are Menoptera, the native dominant species on our planet of Vortis. Your talk of galaxies and dimensions is meaningless to us, as is also this sun and the green things you mention. To us, Vortis is a very heaven. The mists we love, and the sparklings in the sky light our activities. It has always been thus and we know no other. Where we are exiled it is truly a desolation."

"Then . . ." the doctor struggled for expression, "you say you are exiled and yet that you are native to this world. How? . . ."

"We lived once on Vortis," was the reply, "many, many millions of us. The Zarbi were our companions and workers. Lowly in intellect, earthbound and wingless, they served us



obediently and our lives were a paradise. Then a queen evolved among the Zarbi who was very different from the other queens. She grew ambitious and weapons were made in the holes in which the Zarbi dwelt. We Menoptera had made no weapons for we had no enemies. The Zarbi rose and there was war. We had one space-ship in which we had explored our moons, places of horror from which we had fled. Now, after the war had reduced us to a pitiful handful, we were forced to fly to one of the moons. This was many generations ago, since when our numbers have scarcely increased. We are an advance party, come to see what the situation is here on our world to which we long to return. We have weapons now and machinery. Small as we are we feel that we may some day make an attempt to wipe out the Zarbi and regain our homes."

"Zarbi!" mused Dr Who. "What are the Zarbi? Are they insects like you people? On Earth we had insects which appeared to be subject to the will of a superior intellect among them, ants, termites and so on. But no man had ever communicated with any insect so how could we know?"

"The Zarbi are as they were formed and as they always have been," came the answer. "Your talk is strange. I see very little meaning in it. What are ants and termites? Yours must be indeed a very strange world. No wonder you have come to the paradise which is Vortis to take it over for yourselves. But I can promise you that even if you do manage to wipe out our small party, which you may very well do with your frightful weapons, you will still have the Zarbi to reckon with and you will find those cold intellectual queens they have bred, each with myriads of willing slaves, a very different thing from the peaceful Menoptera."

"Once more I tell you," said the doctor angrily, "that I am alone and there are no others with me. I will not be saddled with the responsibility of these mythical creatures you say are like me. They are not from Earth and I know nothing about them. You must have dreamed them up. Or perhaps they are some secret weapon of your enemies the Zarbi. Maybe they are robot fighting machines. . . ."

"Robot . . . robot . . ." came the voice. "You persist in speaking in riddles. You are indeed a curious creature. We hope to learn much from that brain of yours. Are you ready?"

"Ready? Ready for what?" croaked the doctor, at once cold and terrified, all the confident bluster knocked out of him.

"For your examination," was the reply of the leader of the Menoptera. "From your rambling speech I have gathered some quite startling things about you and the world you came from. You mentioned butterflies and you said you were thinking they were 'tiny'. What, on your world, did you do to these 'tiny' Menoptera?"

"Oh," said the doctor airily. "There were many of our scientists who studied insect life. We called them lepidopterists and entomologists and they used to study the lives and habits of certain insects under microscopes. As for the butterflies on Earth, why, they were among the most beautiful things we knew. They were so beautiful that many amongst us made a habit of collecting them. We would put them in bottles with gases which killed them, then we would stick pins. . . ." Appalled he stopped and his blood ran cold. Like a stupid fool he had been running on and thus signing his own death warrant.

"Exactly," came the sighing, toneless voice from the creature. "You are like the Zarbi, cruel and malevolent, strong and vicious towards the small and weak. Now, O Man, for that appears to be your name, the butterflies are your own size and we are many to your one, unless some of your people attempt to rescue you. Now we will find out what you are made of. We could indeed profit by some of the vengeful and cruel ideas you generate, if we can lower our natures to your level. Take him."

They surrounded him again, more of them this time and the pressure of their furry cold bodies forced him over to a corner of the cavern where the lights, seeming to be artificial here, were brighter. Dr Who was in no mood to compare the table on which they stretched him with any operating table on Earth. Like a demented animal he fought desperately to free himself but they almost suffocated him with their soft bodies. When at last they stood off from him he found himself bound and helpless, stretched on the table with four large lights shining down on him. His flesh crawled with horror and his spine seemed to be made of water. He was bathed in perspiration from a terrible, mind-wrenching fear. His position seemed to be hopeless: A bound and motionless prisoner of six-foot-tall insects, alone and friendless on a horrible hostile world, deep in a cavern in its interior. And they were going to . . . they were going to. . . . He saw something gleaming in the claws of one of the creatures and his senses left him.

*   *   *

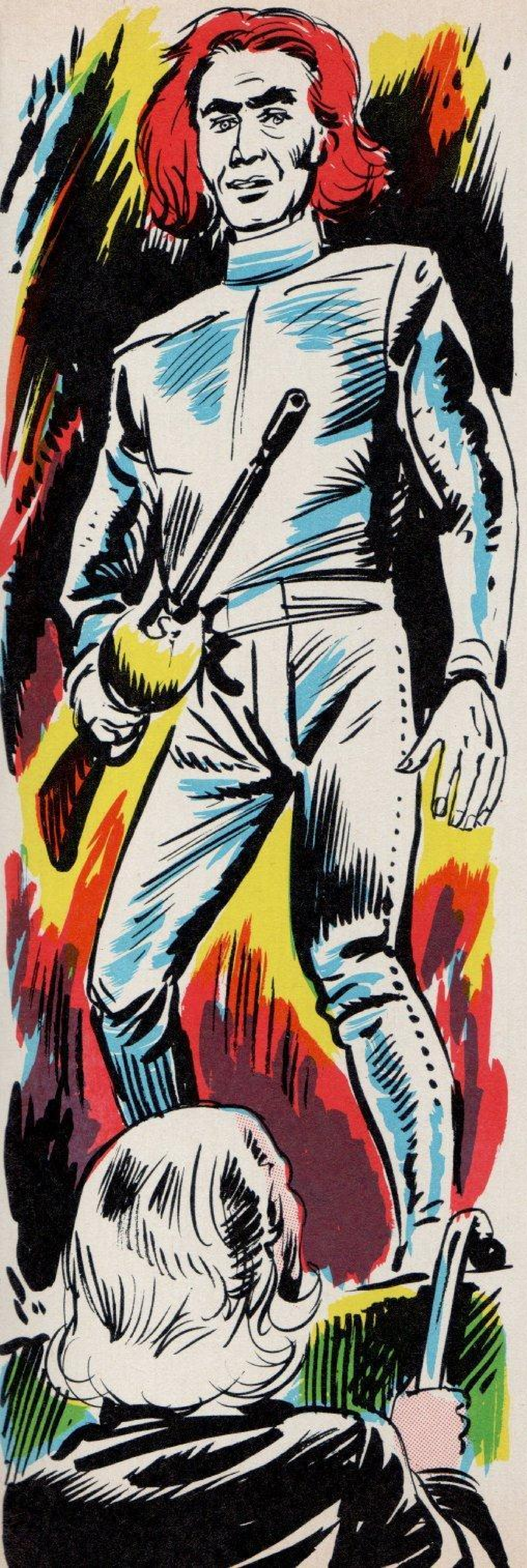
A sickly smell in his nostrils aroused him and he stared wildly around as much as his supine position allowed him to do. A gleaming machine on a stand stood close beside the table where he lay. Lights shone inside it and there were several lenses protruding from the front, lenses on long tubes which revolved in their sockets. Two of them came close to his face and he cringed backwards an inch against his bonds. He felt one break and almost gave a leap of sudden joy. But native caution returned and he lay still, sweating and trembling. The stalked lenses touched his face and moved over its surface. There were murmuring voices all round him and then he saw again the gleaming thing in the little furry claws of the creature who had spoken to him.

His terrified mind could not identify the object, but it did not look like a knife or a scalpel. He cringed as it was laid on his skin and then caution left him and he gave a great heave, broke his bonds and slithered to the floor, free and desperate.

All the Menoptera stood quite still, obviously momentarily dumbfounded at his easy escape from the bonds which they evidently considered very strong. They would have been of some animal substance, he thought, something like the strands of a spider's web. He leaped to his feet and faced them.

From the corners of his eyes he tried to make out the entrance to the cavern. He must find it to escape from the fiendish danger which threatened him from these huge malevolent insects. With the unknown world of the insect Mankind had never made any communication in all the ages; the animal and the insect world existing side by side on Earth without ever having been in mental touch with each other. These enormous butterflies gave one the illusion that, because of their size, they were manlike. But these creatures were insects, true insects, whatever their size.

At last his eyes made out what must be the entrance through which he had been dragged. He began to edge his way along the stone wall towards it, but his captors immediately noticed



and closed in between him and the entrance.

Desperately he stared around him again and he saw the flash and heard the explosion almost at the same time. The whole cavern was lighted, as by a gigantic light. Looking up he saw perched on a ledge of the rocky wall opposite—a man! He rubbed his eyes and looked again. It was indeed a man and he gave a great shout of joy and, regardless now of the Menoptera, he rushed over towards it. They made no attempt to stop him now but stood motionless, their compound eyes gleaming as they stared up at the apparition on the ledge.

A great booming voice bellowed words down to him, words he could not understand, and when he reached the foot of the rock wall he saw that a narrow metal ladder had been let down to the floor. He grasped it and began to ascend. He could hear the murmuring voices of the Menoptera behind him and the rustling of their wings. At last they were trying to reach him again, to grasp him again with their loathsome little paws, secure him again to that hellish operating table. With a gulp he began to climb up faster.

"Great fool that you are," roared a voice from above. "You have risked our whole enterprise, indeed our whole existence. I tremble to think what the Captain will do to you. Hurry, you sluggard, those grubs are after you. Hurry, hurry, I'll give them a blast or two while you try and make it."

A blazing light shone out from above over his ascending body and from down below he heard the mewing, agonised voices of many of the Menoptera as the ray played over them. Then he stood gasping on the ledge, looking at his rescuer.

He was a man, as he had first known, but what a man. Fully eight foot tall and clad in close-fitting silver material which was surely metal but which moved and flowed like fabric. His hair was of a startling red and his face was milky white. He bore in his hands an object as much like an Earth-rifle as the doctor could imagine, except that its magazine was a round white-metal contraption.

"By Zeus," exploded the giant. "Am I asleep and do I dream? Who in the name of the Furies are you, my friend? You are a man, that I can see, but what a man? A puny, old specimen of mankind, as unlike true men as those loathsome bugs down there. How did you come to be here on this Zeus-forsaken ball of rock with its poisonous mists, its many moons and its hordes of giant bugs?"

"I am in your debt for rescuing me," gasped Dr Who. "But I pray you do not ask too much of me at once. I must rest and recover. Those—those creatures down there were going to cut me open to see what was inside me. They prated about my skeleton being inside my body and theirs being outside, all sorts of evil nonsense. Imagine that, they were actually going to dissect me. I must rest and eat and drink. Who are you and what are men doing on this dreadful world dominated by giant insects?"

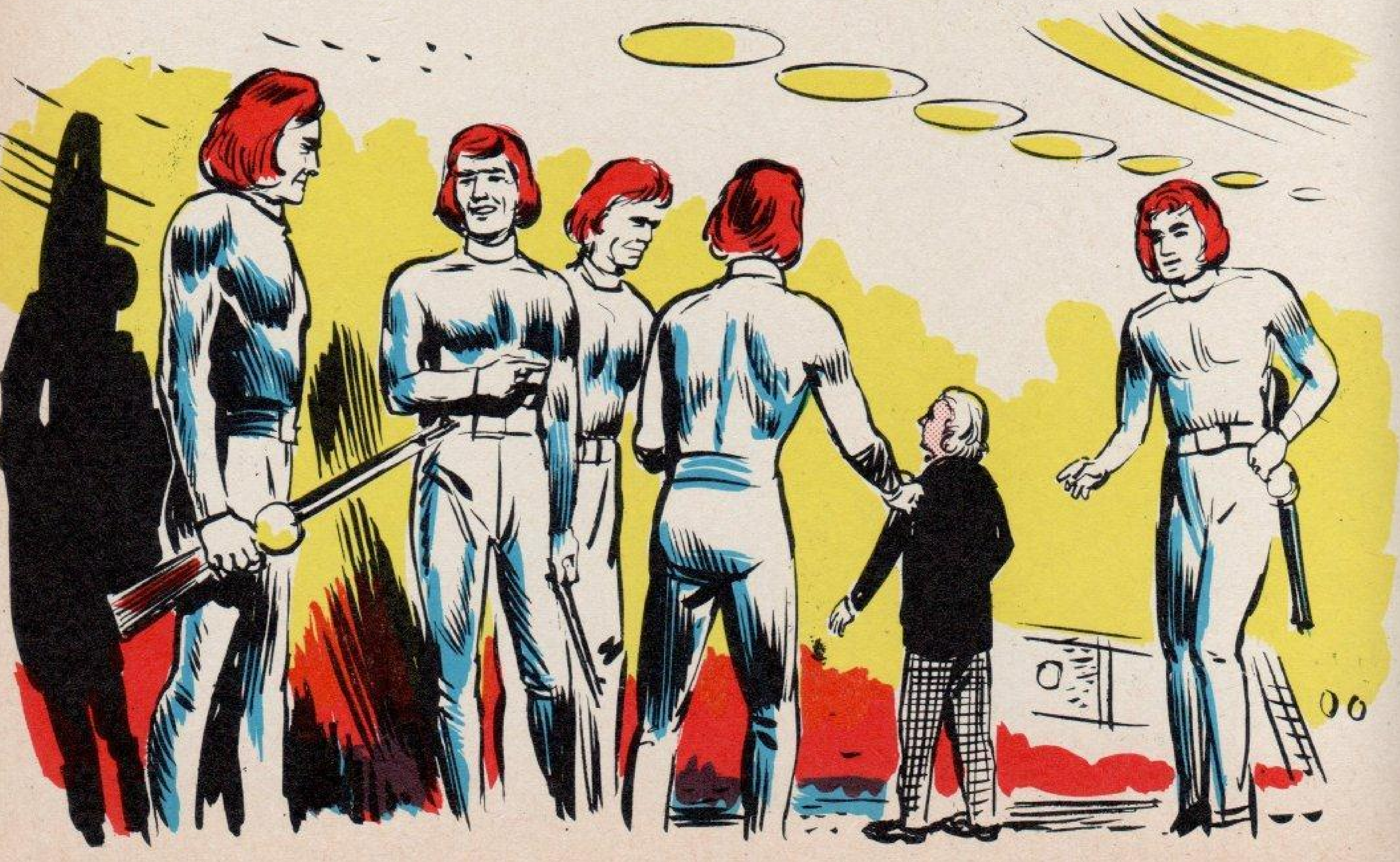
"It's a long story, friend," came in a deep chuckle from the giant's throat. "But come, we waste time. You'll learn all very soon, I can promise you. Food and drink and rest, you said, hey? Well, we've enough of them and your story promises to repay us. Never in all our wanderings have we ever before met a *man*. Come quickly, the bugs are recovering."

Then he was following his rescuer into a fissure in the rock and the world of the cavern was gone. It was very dark in there but gradually the doctor's eyes became used to the darkness and he realised that the clothing of the man in front of him must emit a faint glow, like a glow-worm.

Their way seemed to be taking them further and further into the bowels of the rock and it was growing hotter and hotter. Then they came out into a place where lights shone and there were others, similar giants: silver-clad men, each armed with one of the rifles with the bulbous magazines.

"What new bug have you found now, Axatil?" roared one of them. "By Zeus himself, old Mother Nature does work in the most curious ways. This one even *looks* like a man. Imagine that now. A world of insects grown to man size and they evolve an insect which looks like a man. Tell us, Axatil, does it fly or crawl? Does it speak or chirp? Does it lay eggs or does it grow from a larva? But why in the name of the Furies, have you brought it in *alive*. You know the orders. All insect life must be destroyed whenever and wherever encountered. Commonsense, Axatil. Who knows what poison this bug spits out. Why even the touch of its cold hard skin may be fatal to the Sons of the Sun."

Dr Who felt bewildered standing in the middle of these jovial bloodthirsty giants. For a moment a memory of the gentle Menoptera came back to him. Then—of course, those gentle Menoptera were going to dissect him, cut him up and watch his bleeding organs working. . . . He reeled and accidentally touched one



of the giants. He was amazed at the heat that radiated from the body of the giant. Then a new and louder voice boomed in his ears and out of a metal door in the side of the small cave there emerged a ninth man, even taller than the others. His hair was, if anything, even redder and there was a most fierce expression on his face.

"By Zeus the Thunderer, and Ares his son," roared the new voice. "The gods have surely cursed me when I am served by such lunatics as you, Axatil. This creature, this ant, this grub, this louse—you bring it in here where every inch is precious, where every ounce of oxygen is like the platinum of our home. You bring this . . . this . . . thing in here. Take it to the pit, man, and atomise it."

Axatil grinned in the Captain's face unabashed by the other's fury, for he was in a strong position. Dr Who stood trembling like a small boy amongst gangsters as these giants roared at each other above his head. "Captain," Axatil said. "This creature is a *man*, as we are. True, he is small, tiny even, but he is a man and no insect. I will prove it to you. Look." And, to Dr Who's fury, he began to tear the clothes off his back. And, so powerful was the giant Axatil, that the doctor's struggles were quite useless and in spite of his angry protests and violent struggles, he soon found himself standing naked amongst the giants.

They were not laughing now as they surrounded him curiously, like buyers at a cattle-market, thought the Doctor furiously.

"Truly a miracle," marvelled the Captain in his loud roaring voice. "Axatil, you did well, this is indeed a man, as we are. Get your garments on again, friend, and forgive us our fun. We are but common soldiers, who must be ever on our guard. This fiendish place on which the Fates have cast us is so like Hades that there were some among us who first thought they were dead and were actually in Hades. But, tell me, who are you and whence came you? You are not one of us."

With as much dignity as he could muster, Dr Who scrambled into his clothes and by a mighty effort of will, he held this vast creature at arm's length without replying while he carefully retied his cravat. He looked fearlessly into that chalk-white face and a severe expression came over his face.

"A fine thing!" he said at last. "I meet real men for the first time and what kind of reception do I get? Common soldiers you say you are. I might have known that, from your attitude and your rough, brutal ways. Well, my friend, I am a scientist, a traveller in space and in the galaxy known as the Milky Way. I am a scientist who is engaged in exploring the universe. My ship travels in space at an instantaneous velociy and I can travel backwards and forwards through Time as readily as I can travel from galaxy to galaxy."

There was an absolute hush at his words, and now even the violent giant known as the Captain drew back from him as though frightened. And fright on such a ferocious giant as he, was a thing to behold.

"A doctor!" he chattered. "A scientist! By Zeus, we have been forestalled. Great sir, where is your ship? By the grace of the gods we have found you and rather than we rescue you it is you who have rescued us. But . . ." and a doubtful gleam came into his big violet eyes, ". . . if you are indeed a doctor and scientist, how does it come that you were helpless in the grip of those grubs outside? Why did you not defend yourself, slay them and escape with ease? It is indeed difficult for us common soldiers to imagine a scientist ever in physical danger."

Dr Who stared to the right and left of him arrogantly. Somehow, in some strange way, the attitude of these strange fellows had changed. They were now treating him like an honoured guest, indeed, almost like a leader. The Captain's suspicions must be allayed at once.

"I wandered foolishly from my vessel," he said with dignity. "I brought no weapons and the very strangeness and horror of those loathsome Menoptera at first overcame me. I had released myself from my bonds when your Axatil saw me."

"You know the name of that species!" The Captain seemed awed by such knowledge. "We've been here a year already and all we've done is slaughter the brutes whenever we encountered them. We didn't even know they had a name."

"You do not, then, know the Zarbi?" asked the doctor, quick to pursue his advantage. "The giant ants who war on these Menoptera?"

"By the Furies no," said the Captain. "We've been stuck in here inside this bubble in the rock ever since we crashlanded on this benighted world. Oh, we've been out on the surface from time to time. We've explored the place but it's no planet for men. There's nothing here for us."

"Then why have you waited a year before departing?" asked the doctor curiously. "And where is your ship? You speak of a bubble inside the rock. . . ."

"We are Expedition Number 3398, sir," said the Captain respectfully, and the doctor noted with satisfaction that the giant fellow was almost standing to attention. "We've been space-borne for over ten years now and . . ." an expression came over his huge white face almost like that of a small boy detected in some wrong doing, ". . . the truth, sir, is that we are lost. Quite, quite, lost. We don't even know which galaxy we are in. I know this will disgrace me with the Supreme Council when we get back, if ever we do get back. But I have to confess it, now that we have met a real scientist from home. All our locator instruments have been damaged in our wars and until we get them repaired, we have to stay here, in this hole in the rock in this fiendish planet. We are all soldiers now. Our last scientist died of some plague we found on some other miserable planet we landed on. There's not a man amongst us who can even understand the instruments, let alone repair them. But Zeus in his mercy has sent you to us, great sir. You will repair our locator instruments and then we will set course for home, to report our total failure."

"Total failure?" asked the doctor. "Failure in what?"

"Why, the great plan to colonise the universe, sir? Have you yourself been away so long that you know nothing about it? It may be so, for the plan was only devised twenty or thirty years ago. Oh, we succeeded in some of our orders. We left our parties of colonists in those planets we found suitable, each with a Master Scientist to lead them. We have been out ten years now and we've lost our own Master Scientist. That isn't going to look very well for our records when we touch down in the Inner Ring of the mighty world-city of Atlantis, now is it, great sir?"

For a moment Dr Who stood quite still, his mind reeling at the words the other had uttered. Atlantis! No, it couldn't be true. The place had never existed, only as a mere legend. This fellow spoke of a *world-city* as though his Atlantis had straddled the whole Earth. Nonsense, of course, sheer nonsense. Then he glanced at the huge fellow, took in his chalk-white face, after ten years of sunless space-flight, his vivid red hair and gigantic physique. His eyes wandered to the side of the cave and he saw that it was quite smooth and shot with silvery gleams. This was the side of their space-ship! His mouth almost fell open in astonishment. He decided he must play for time.

"I myself have been wandering through the universe, alone in my small ship," he said with dignity. "I am on the business of the Supreme Council and I left Earth fifty years ago.* Therefore, I knew nothing of the plan you refer to."

"You have not then communicated with Earth since you left?" said the giant, wrinkling his brows. "That sounds odd, sir, if I may say so. We ourselves have reported every month until . . . until . . . this final disaster."

The doctor thought quickly and smiled up at the Captain confidently and with authority. "I have not yet found that which the Supreme Council sent me to find. Until I succeed, I see no purpose in reporting home."

"That's true, great sir," said the Captain. "True, true, indeed. Pardon a rough soldier. But surely the gods sent you to us, sir. Come into our ship, sir, and look at our locator instruments. You'll be able to put them right in no time, I'll wager."

Dr Who smirked to himself. The idea wasn't all that very fantastic at that. In his *Tardis* he had instruments which might puzzle any of the Master Scientists of lost Atlantis.

As they stood there, time seemed to expand till, in a second, he began to remember the old legend of lost Atlantis, of that mighty empire island in the South Atlantic, destroyed utterly by some unknown cataclysm many thousands of years before history began (again) on Earth; before man went forward unknowing that a mighty civilisation had gone before and been destroyed so utterly that only a legend remained. The Captain's chalk-white face loomed before him. And this fellow said he had left Atlantis only ten years before now? But when was *Now*? Dr Who had not the faintest notion of his

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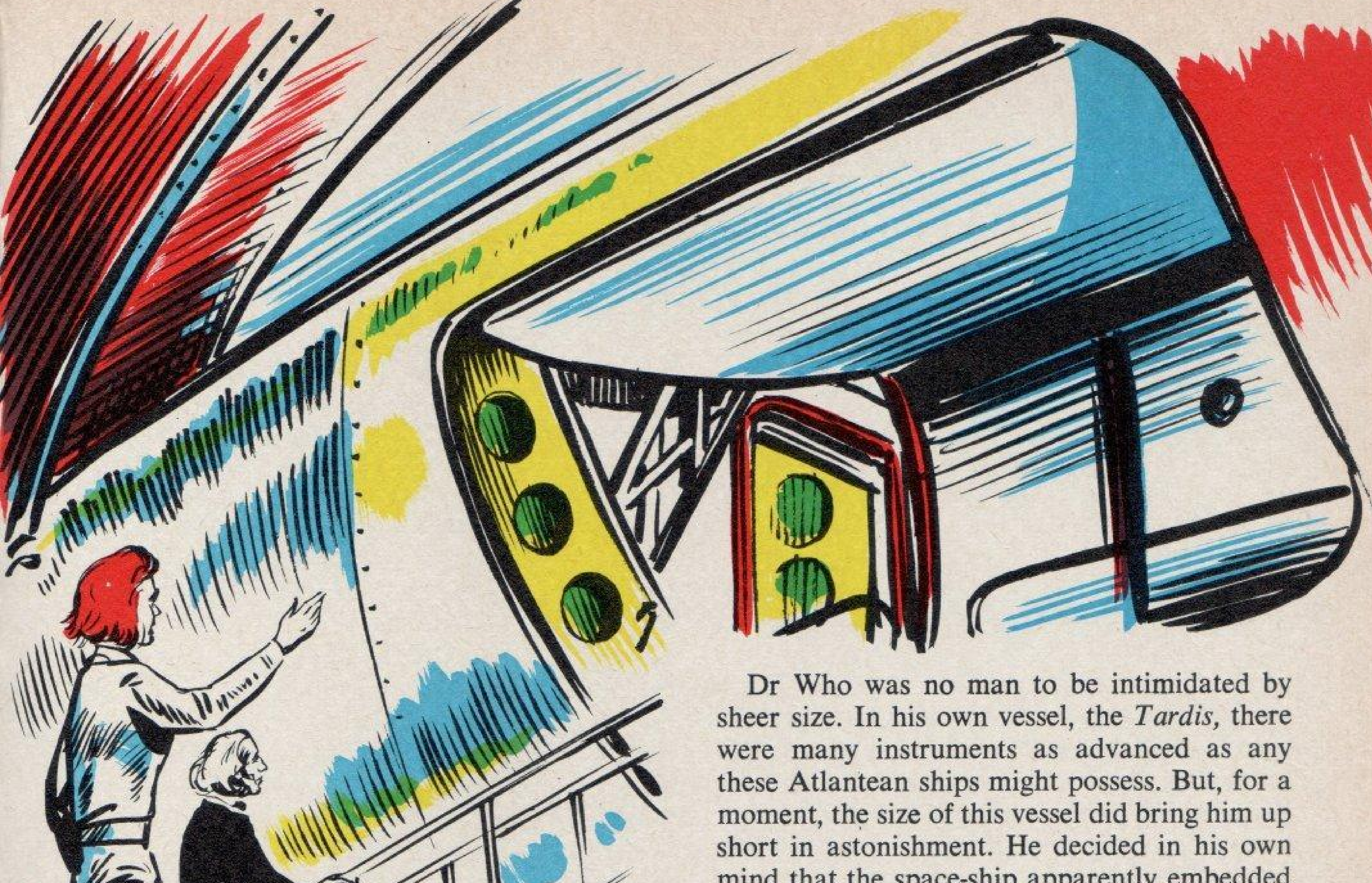
* Dr Who is prevaricating, because, of course, he did not come from Earth.



position in Time. How could he have, without relating his position in Time with some known era of Time?

"This way, great sir," the Captain was saying and the Doctor came out of his daydream. He saw an oval door open and a light shine out. He was looking into the interior of the Atlantean space-ship.

Dr Who was no man to be intimidated by sheer size. In his own vessel, the *Tardis,* there were many instruments as advanced as any these Atlantean ships might possess. But, for a moment, the size of this vessel did bring him up short in astonishment. He decided in his own mind that the space-ship apparently embedded in the rock must be all of half a mile in length. Through corridor after corridor he was led, through halls and chambers filled with glittering engines and machinery, instruments and stores. Many rooms were empty of all but beds: these would be the abandoned quarters of the colonists left by the crew on the planets they had visited.

"Before I do anything further at all," the doctor said firmly. "I must eat, drink and sleep. After that, I will help you. That is final."

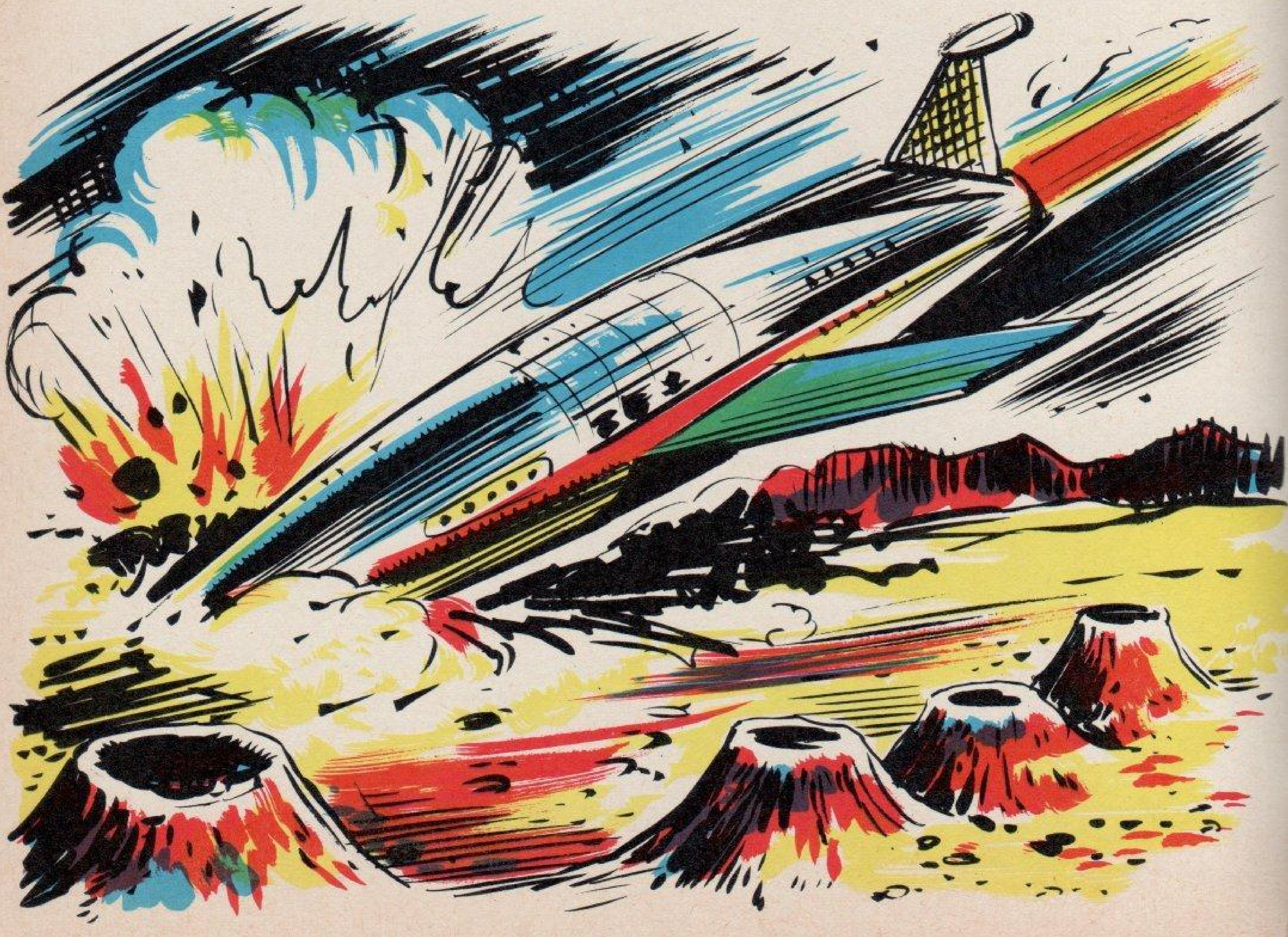
"Of course, great sir," was the quite humble reply of the Captain. He led the way to a chamber evidently used by the remaining crew as living quarters. He was given food and drink, evidently synthetic and quite unidentifiable. But it went down and then he stretched out on a couch. The rest of the crew were not in sight and the Captain, seeing the doctor's eyes closed, withdrew.

Dr Who was not normally troubled with dreams but now he was lost in a swirling phantasmagoria of nightmares. The imagined legendary Atlantis, peopled by mighty intellects, had really existed then. Visions of what it had been like raced across his mind. How many thousands of years before history began on

Earth, had Atlantis been destroyed or, as many on Earth speculated, had destroyed itself in some world-embracing atomic war? From the specimens of Atlanteans he had seen, this was most likely. A more bloodthirsty lot of men he had never met. The dreams then moved to Vortis, with its opposing factions of giant insects; the gentle Menoptera, intelligent and oppressed by the giant ants they knew as the Zarbi; mindless workers and soldiers each under the hypnotic control of some super ant or queen, doubtless hidden deep in the bowels of the planet.

He woke to a problem. These eight Atlantean soldiers said they had been away from Earth for ten years only. Yet thousands of earth-years had elapsed since Atlantis had been destroyed so that no trace was left. That meant that his *Tardis* had carried him thousands of years back into the past as well as carrying him to Vortis. Theoretically, he could carry these men in their repaired ship, back to the Atlantis they knew. Or he could carry them back in his *Tardis* to the Earth of modern times. They would be sensational visitors to modern Earth. There might be many secrets of Nature which they knew and which Earth scientists had not yet rediscovered. But they were so bloodthirsty and ferocious. Their only idea of life seemed to be of war; of killing, slaughter and extermination.

So complex and new were the Atlantean instruments that it was three days before the doctor even found the instruments he was looking for and three days more before he found out how to repair them. By that time, his mind was made up. He must on no account permit this ship to be let loose on the universe again. It had apparently plunged to the surface of Vortis out of control. Made of indestructible metal, they called it impervium apparently, it had bored deeply into the rocky surface and lay now, all half-mile of it, embedded in the rock not too far from the outside. It would take time, but it could be done and the ship could break out. But in his own mind he determined that this great ship, filled with the most frightful engines of destruction and slaughter that he had ever imagined, must remain forever here where a kind Fate had thrown it. To send it back to lost Atlantis would be bad enough. To send it back to modern Earth would condemn his world to destruction or slavery. Even eight of these bloodthirsty giants could domi-



nate Earth, so powerful and so destructive were the weapons at their command.

"It is useless," he told the Captain at length. "It is true I can repair these instruments but the necessary tools and spare parts, the metals and the chemicals are not here. I must return to my own ship to obtain the supplies."

"As the Master Scientist says," was the Captain's reply. "For that I was prepared. We can do that. We have engines that can blast a path for us through this rock out to where your vessel rests. We have not done this before because that would have meant abandoning ship. Now I will leave four of my men here and the other four and myself will accompany you to the outside and will escort you back. For this, great sir, I trust you will speak kindly of us to the Supreme Council."

Some of the lost Atlantean colonists on Earth must have settled in Ancient Greece, Dr Who realised, as these fellows apparently still worshipped the old gods of Greece. Some would have settled in Ancient Egypt, and some in Crete. All of them had forgotten their noble origins and settled down into primitive savagery. He roused himself.

"Yes, yes, of course. I will do that, friend. Now, get busy and make a way out to the outside. It was west of the cavern from which your man rescued me."

He never knew what process was involved but the great ship wedged in the rock vibrated from stem to stern as the titanic forces took hold. Some process of disintegration of the atoms of the earth and rock, Dr Who guessed. The rock seemed to melt in front of their eyes as they stood in the little bubble in the rock. Downwards the pathway grew and the four giants, with Dr Who in the lead, trod warily down the new pathway carved in the rocks.

On went the disintegrating beam and the outside was there, the outside of the swirling mists, the glittering motes in the sky and the moons hanging up like lanterns. "There is my ship," he cried, filled with exultation.

The Captain frowned. "I see no ship," he said harshly.

"There, look, you great fool," cried the doctor pointing to his *Tardis*.

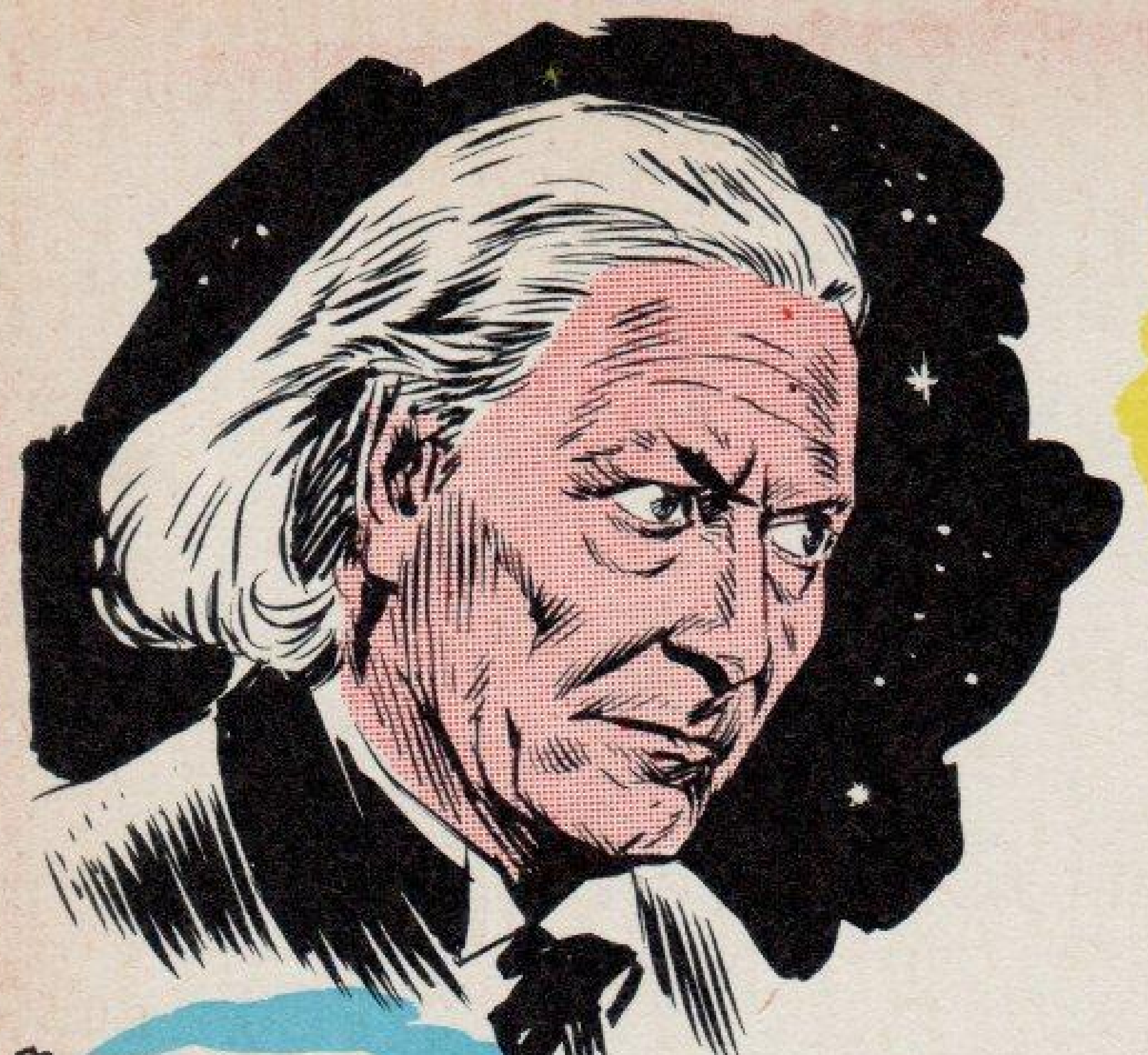
"It is you who is the great fool," retorted the Captain. "That tiny box! You are an impostor. You are no Master Scientist of Atlantis. Men, men," he bawled out in his gigantic voice. "This is a trap. We have been tricked. Blast this midget from existence."

Then Dr Who ran, ran as hard as he had ever run before, ran as though devils were after him. And as he ran he saw that this was so in very truth. They had emerged into the middle of what was evidently a pitched battle between the Menoptera and others he knew must be the Zarbi. Everywhere the Menoptera flew, attacking the Zarbi with what looked like pitifully feeble weapons of some sort. Hordes of Zarbi mowed them down in their hundreds as they flew about distractedly.

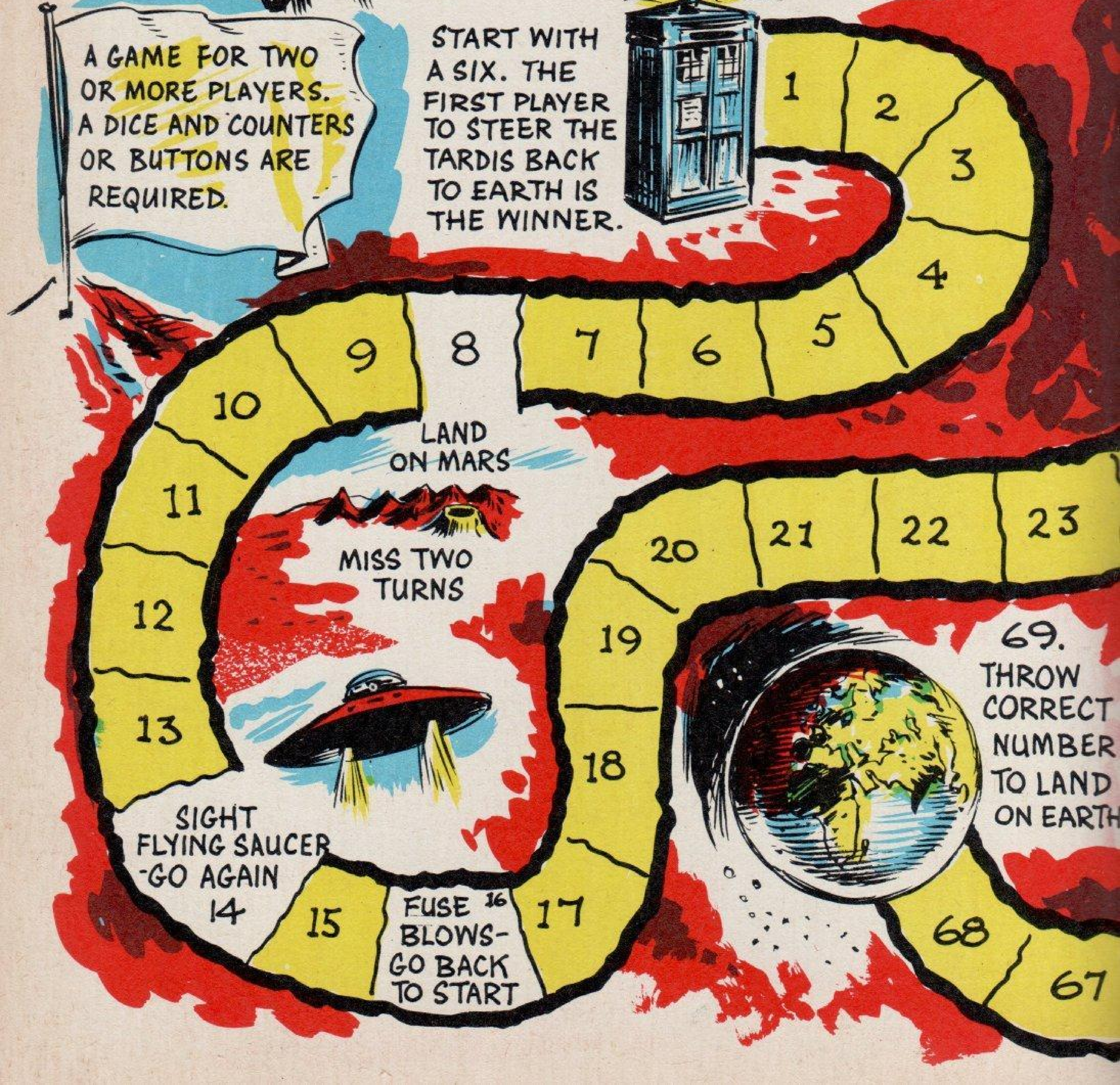
The doctor's soul shuddered as he fled through the hordes of eight-foot ants guiding their main weapons, crawling louse-like things with a weapon protruding from its head which spat in all directions. The fearsome heads of the Zarbi surrounded him on all sides, their vast compound eyes gleaming and their giant mandibles opened to seize him. What titanic intelligence from afar was guiding these things?

He reached the *Tardis* at length and threw off his Atmosphere Density Jacket and for the first time for days breathed good normal air. He stood in the threshold and looked out. The five Atlanteans were fighting against a rocky buttress, fighting with all their might. But the Zarbi numbered thousands, possibly millions, and the doctor knew it was only a matter of time. A vague regret filled his soul. After all, ferocious and bloodthirsty as they were, they were still men. They were, in some senses, his own ancestors. And the Zarbi and the Menoptera were only insects, no matter what their size and intelligence. That the Menoptera were the most worthy race on Vortis, the doctor knew now beyond all doubt. But the Zarbi were also native to that world, and the archaic Atlanteans were the intruders. Fate could be trusted to see that things went right for the whole great plan and he must not interfere.

Going to the controls he activated the great door. The scene outside faded and the troubled planet Vortis faded from view, and in the sightscreens the swirling mists and the gigantic basalt needles of white rock gave way to the grey featurelessness that exists between the dimensions. The *Tardis* was once more on its way.



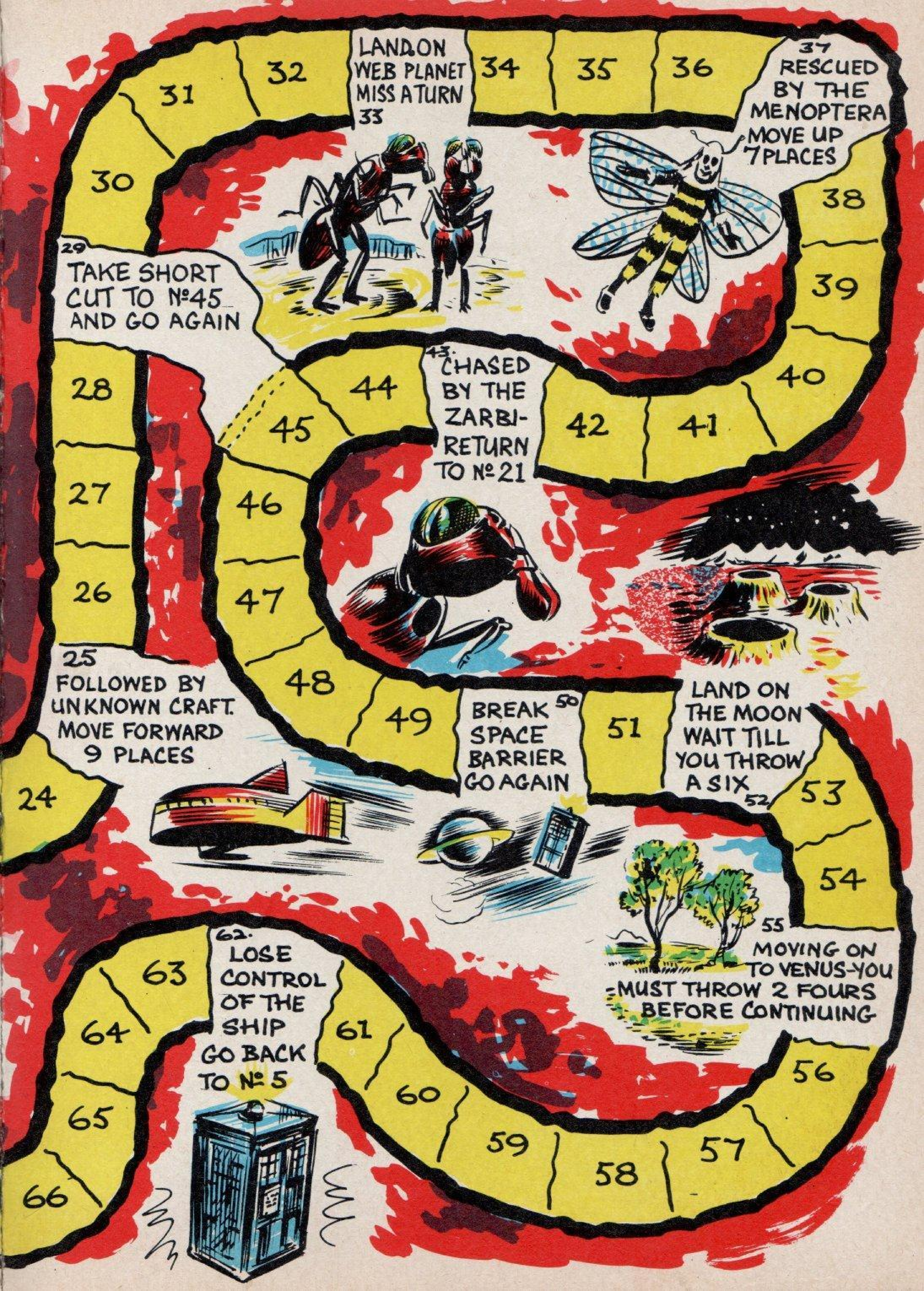
JOURNEY BACK TO EARTH



A GAME FOR TWO OR MORE PLAYERS. A DICE AND COUNTERS OR BUTTONS ARE REQUIRED.

START WITH A SIX. THE FIRST PLAYER TO STEER THE TARDIS BACK TO EARTH IS THE WINNER.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
LAND ON MARS
MISS TWO TURNS
9
10
11
12
13
SIGHT FLYING SAUCER -GO AGAIN
14
15
FUSE 16 BLOWS- GO BACK TO START
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
69. THROW CORRECT NUMBER TO LAND ON EARTH
68
67


24
25 FOLLOWED BY UNKNOWN CRAFT. MOVE FORWARD 9 PLACES
26
27
28
29 TAKE SHORT CUT TO №45 AND GO AGAIN
30
31
32
33 LAND ON WEB PLANET MISS A TURN
34
35
36
37 RESCUED BY THE MENOPTERA MOVE UP 7 PLACES
38
39
40
41
42
43. CHASED BY THE ZARBI-RETURN TO №21
44
45
46
47
48
49
50 BREAK SPACE BARRIER GO AGAIN
51
52 LAND ON THE MOON WAIT TILL YOU THROW A SIX
53
54
55 MOVING ON TO VENUS-YOU MUST THROW 2 FOURS BEFORE CONTINUING
56
57
58
59
60
61
62. LOSE CONTROL OF THE SHIP GO BACK TO № 5
63
64
65
66

The Equations

THERE is no Space that is without Time and there is no Time where there is no Space. The two, Space and Time, exist together endlessly, and each without the other has no real existence or even meaning.

But, as an experiment, think of the two separately for a while. Consider Infinity of Space and Eternity of Time. Take a few minutes, a few months, a few years, a few centuries, a few aeons. And still there is no meaning in the two terms to our human minds. After a million million miles Space still must stretch endlessly out there. After a million million years, Eternity is only just beginning.

When he built his *Tardis*, Dr Who well knew that its journeys must be in Time as well as in Space. All the marvellous and intricate electronic instruments in his vessel are built on that basis. At the start of a journey, the *Tardis* becomes resolved into a looser pattern of atoms and electrons than is familiar in matter on Earth. The new pattern, and all it contains, is transferred instantaneously to any point in Space and any moment in Time which the doctor's settings of his instruments has selected. In our Space-Time of the universe we see with our eyes and our telescopes, we travel the long and weary way of matter as we know it. In our imaginary space-ship, built on Earth, it would take us four and a half years to reach the nearest star to our Sun, even if our space-ship could travel at the velocity of light, 186,000 miles per second. The *Tardis* can travel to a far-distant galaxy in an instant by transferring its atoms, loosely patterned, out

# of DR WHO

of our normal material Space-Time sphere, directly to the other Space-Time sphere Dr Who has selected.

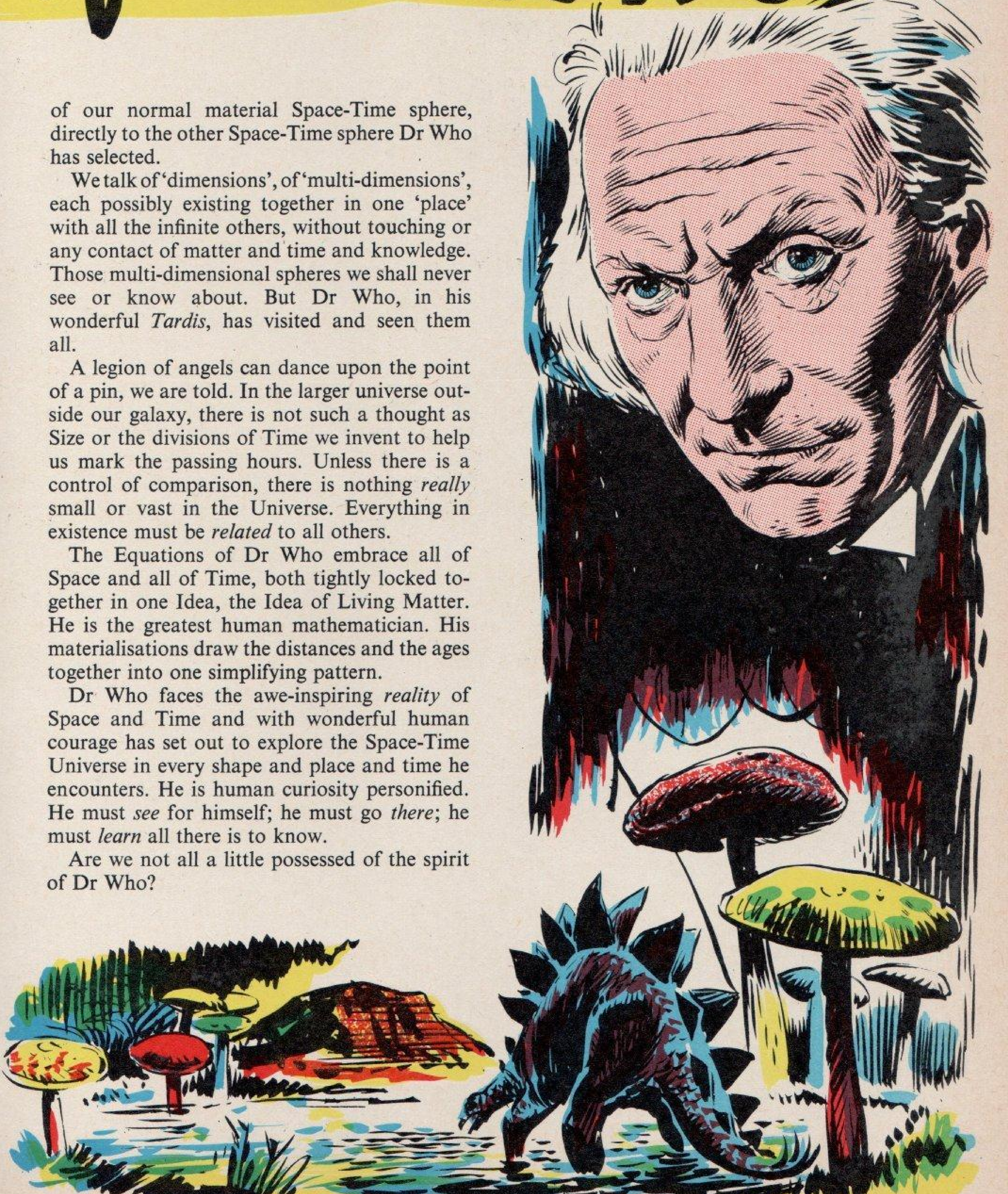
We talk of 'dimensions', of 'multi-dimensions', each possibly existing together in one 'place' with all the infinite others, without touching or any contact of matter and time and knowledge. Those multi-dimensional spheres we shall never see or know about. But Dr Who, in his wonderful *Tardis*, has visited and seen them all.

A legion of angels can dance upon the point of a pin, we are told. In the larger universe outside our galaxy, there is not such a thought as Size or the divisions of Time we invent to help us mark the passing hours. Unless there is a control of comparison, there is nothing *really* small or vast in the Universe. Everything in existence must be *related* to all others.

The Equations of Dr Who embrace all of Space and all of Time, both tightly locked together in one Idea, the Idea of Living Matter. He is the greatest human mathematician. His materialisations draw the distances and the ages together into one simplifying pattern.

Dr Who faces the awe-inspiring *reality* of Space and Time and with wonderful human courage has set out to explore the Space-Time Universe in every shape and place and time he encounters. He is human curiosity personified. He must *see* for himself; he must go *there*; he must *learn* all there is to know.

Are we not all a little possessed of the spirit of Dr Who?



The MONSTERS from EARTH

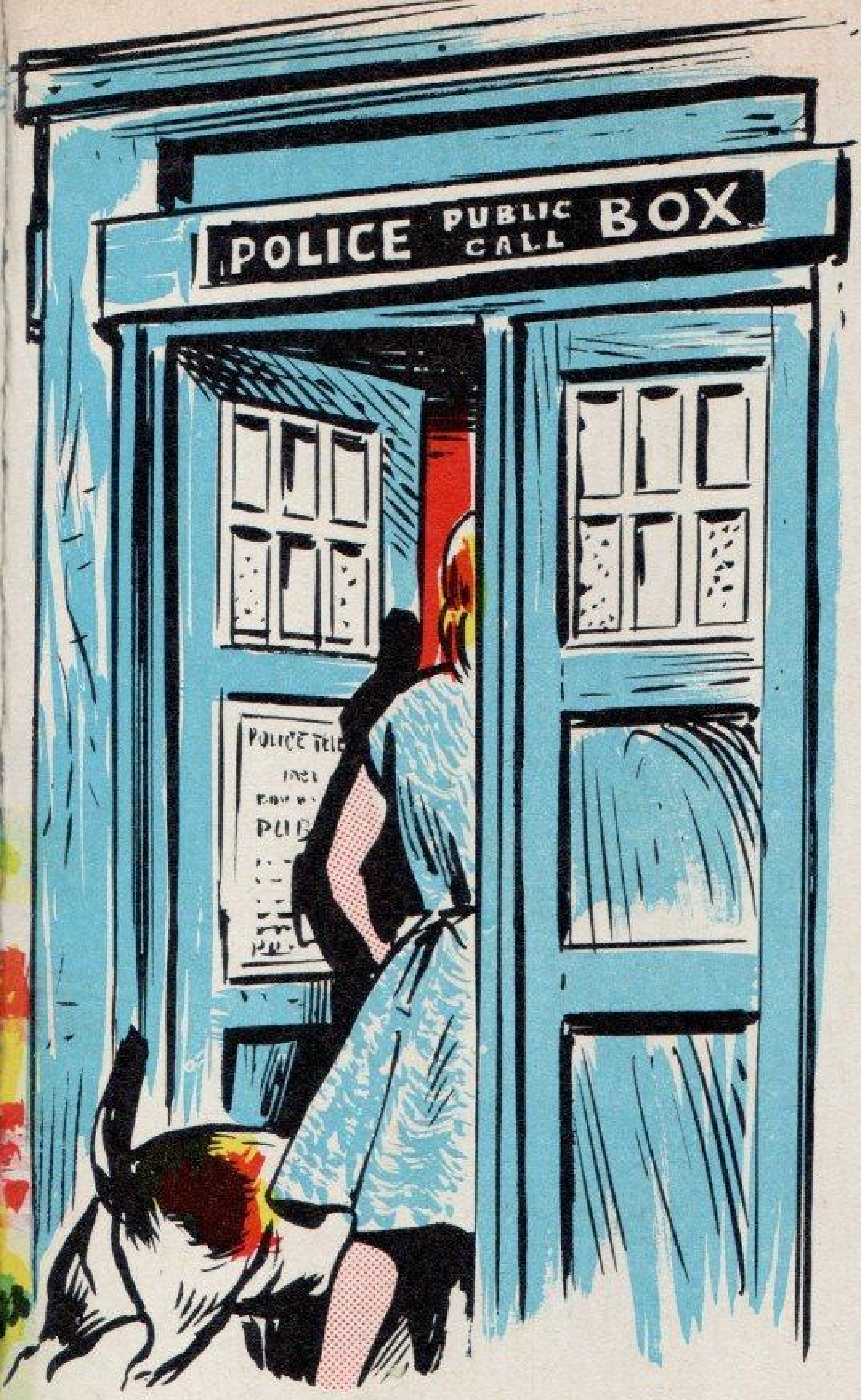
"I'LL hide in here," giggled Amy Barker. "He'll never think of looking in here. Come on, Butch, and don't yap, you silly dog, or he'll know where we are."

But Butch, the small French bulldog, just couldn't help yapping as he pranced after Amy into the blue police telephone-box. Amy did have time to think it rather odd for a police telephone-box to be stuck here in a thicket of thorn-bushes in a remote part of the common. But that was just as she went through the doorway. After that, well, her breath was so taken away that she could only just stand and gape at the glittering interior behind the prosaic exterior.

Her brother, Tony, hearing Butch's telltale bark, followed her quickly and in triumph put his hand on her shoulder. "Got you," he crowed. "I've won, now it's my turn——" Then he too was struck dumb by the sight of the truly wonderful interior of the strange box-like vehicle which journeyed to all worlds and to all times: the *Tardis*.

"Amy," he breathed after a while. "I know what it is, it's a space-ship. It's landed here and the crew have gone out and left the door open. I wonder where it's come from and what the people are like. They might be from Mars——"

"But just look at that chair," said Amy. "It's just like a chair at home. Martians wouldn't be like us, would they? It's . . . it's . . . all so marvellous. It's like a space-ship out of a story. Look at those television screens and that round sort of counter and all those knobs and levers and switches."



"This'll be the control panel," said Tony loftily. "From here the pilots can control all the mechanism, the rockets and so on—but look, there aren't any rockets, or wings, or wheels, or anything like that at all. It's just an ordinary telephone-box. We both saw the outside. Tell you what, Amy, we're asleep and we're dreaming all this. It can't be true, you know, it just isn't possible."

"Of course it's true," said the practical Amy. "We can see these things and we can touch them. Do you hear that sort of humming in the air all round us. And the lights, how bright they are. I wonder if there's anybody still inside. Come on, we'll explore."

"Better not go too far from the door," said Tony cautiously and he slipped a finger through Butch's collar. "Stop sniffing round there, Butch. You know, sis, if there is anybody still here, we don't know what they'll be like. They might be monsters, giant lizards, huge insect-men, like they have in the stories. Hey there, wait for me."

But Amy had wandered away to investigate. He followed her, looking fearfully back at the open door and at the sunlight outside on the common. There was something strange and weird about this queer box-like thing which inside seemed to stretch ever so wide. But he felt he would rather follow her than stay where he was, alone, except for Butch. And Butch broke from his grasp and scampered after Amy. He went through a door after her and his elbow caught the door and swung it closed. He heard it click and pushed against it to open it again. But all the doors in the *Tardis* opened and closed with electronic keys only, and had no normal handles or locks. They were prisoners inside the new room.

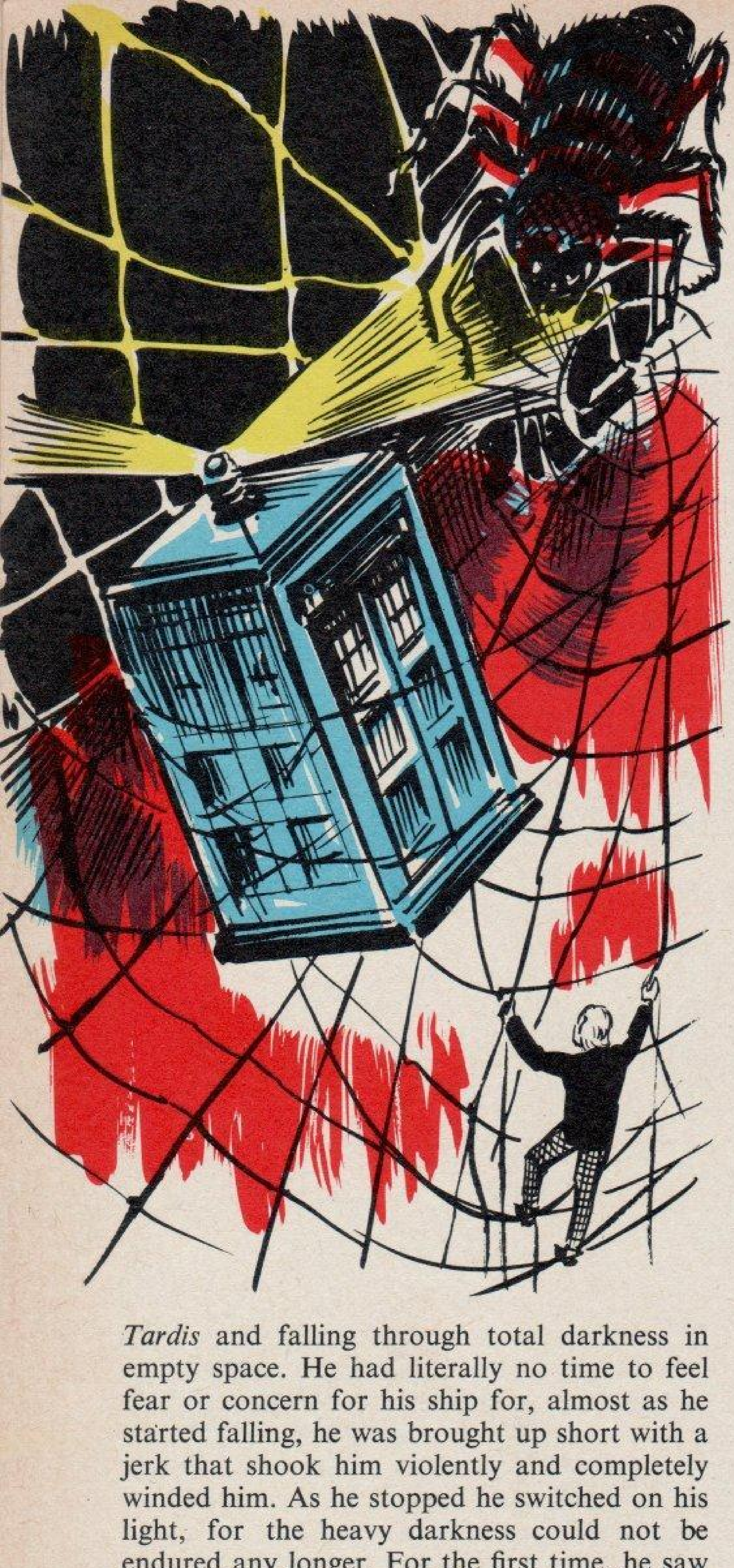
* * *

Dr Who walked dejectedly back to his ship. So there had been an error in his settings of the instruments. He had materialised on Earth in the year 1966 and those facts, ascertained in the village he had just visited, gave him no satisfaction. He must try again and quickly, or some yokel might discover his ship and wander inside. He closed the great doorway and went at once to the control panel. This time he must make no mistakes. The settings this time must be way out of the galaxy and many years away from 1966 on Earth. The centre panel rose and the lights all glittered. The normal humming note rose and rose in pitch until he could no longer hear it. The *Tardis* was off again.

In the new materialisation the first thing the doctor felt was that the *Tardis* had landed on to a base that was by no means firm. A slight swaying motion was obvious at once. His sight-screens showed complete darkness and he gave a peevish sigh. There was always this irritating uncertainty on materialisation into a new sphere, you never knew whether you had arrived by day or by night.

"Dear me, dear me," murmured the doctor to himself. "This is a nice state of affairs. Now, where is that searchlight of mine?"

Equipped with his hand searchlight he activated the great door and stood waiting. As he stepped through, the first lurch came and he staggered on the threshold grasping it wildly. A second lurch carried him headlong out of the



Tardis and falling through total darkness in empty space. He had literally no time to feel fear or concern for his ship for, almost as he started falling, he was brought up short with a jerk that shook him violently and completely winded him. As he stopped he switched on his light, for the heavy darkness could not be endured any longer. For the first time, he saw that his ship had materialised into about as strange a sphere as any he had ever experienced.

He was lying on his back along what looked like a very thick rope. It extended into the darkness both upwards and downwards and from side to side. Where he lay was the crosspoint of two strands.

Trying to rise to a sitting position he found difficulty, for the rope seemed to be holding him down. He jerked up and sticky strands from the rope held his coat-tails. His hands, exploring, met the sticky substance too and at once he was conscious of a nauseating smell. He recognised formaldehyde and decaying vegetation and other foul smells. Angrily, he pulled himself free from the rope and stood erect, swaying from side to side as his light flashed hither and thither.

The beam, dancing about, showed him that the rope strands on which he was keeping a perilous balance were strung everywhere about the place. He felt quite certain that he was not in the open; this must be a huge cave. The ropes swung everywhere his light shone and they followed a pattern. There was regularity here; this was no haphazard maze. He looked upwards and the light showed him the *Tardis*, caught in a mass of the strands with the doorway still open and the interior lights shining out. But, as the vessel had been pulled by the strands on to its side, the lights were shining upwards. And what those lights revealed almost froze the blood in the doctor's veins.

Two tiny lights glowed by reflection up there, two lights fairly close together, moving sluggishly together as the swinging lights swept across them. The strands were creeping across his body, as though they were living things striving to entrap him, to bind him so tightly in their sticky grasp that the life might be crushed from his body and then his carcass would be drawn up through that foul-smelling darkness to. . . . His mind would not complete the picture and he threw up his hands wildly.

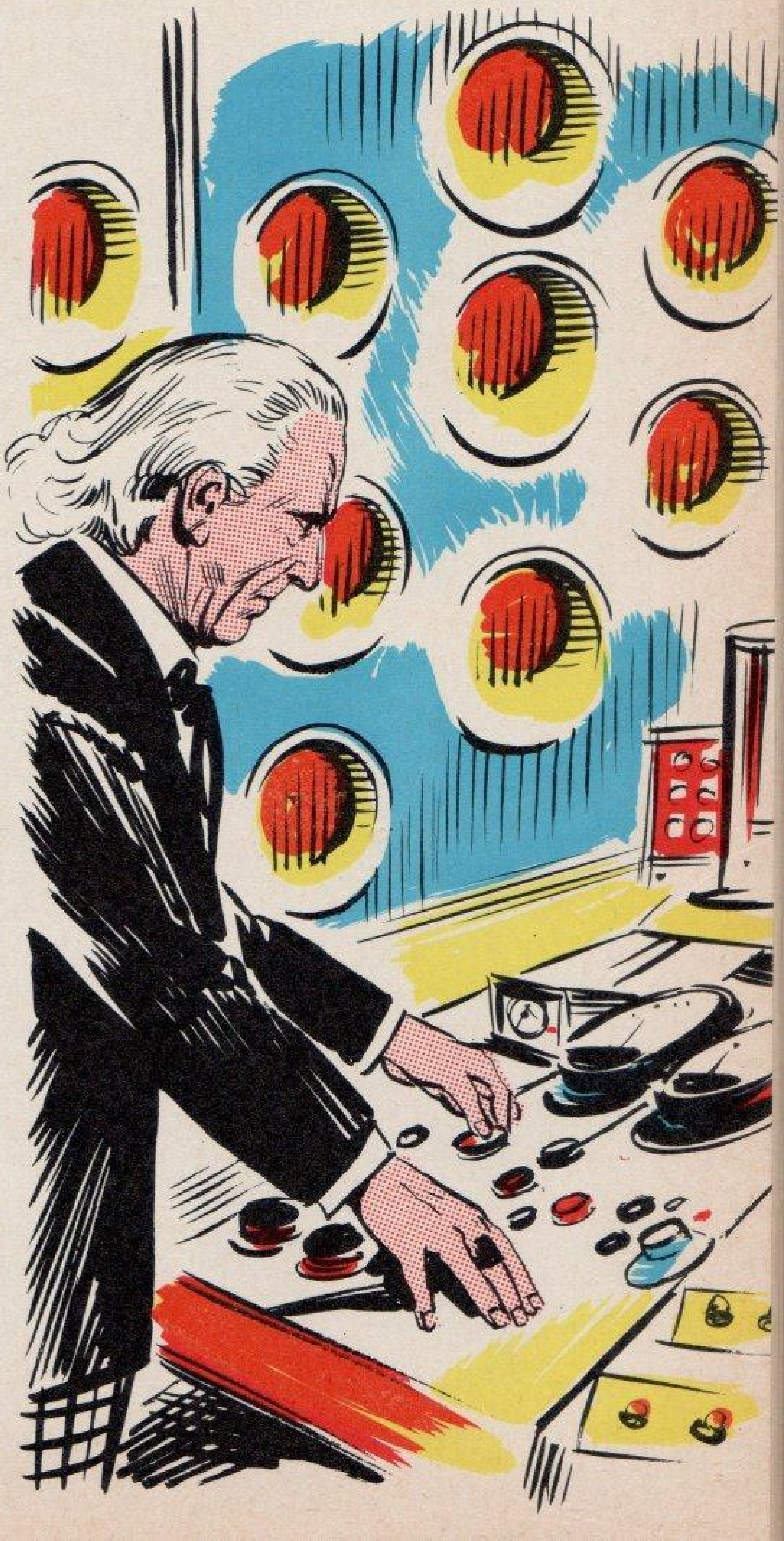
They caught one of the strands and he gripped tightly. Like an acrobat he swung across a chasm of blackness and landed on another strand which gave to his weight and swung him upwards again. His hand searchlight swung erratically about. Then at last he knew without any doubt. The *Tardis* was caught fast in a mass of the strands and its lights streaming out now held steady. Down its beam was coming the thing that Dr Who's mind had fought against recognising. He and his vessel were caught in a gigantic web and the spinner of the web, a spider of truly gigantic proportions, was coming towards him down the web, its deadly eyes glowing, its legs and feelers dancing across the strands, towards its victim. The doctor, even in his extreme terror, had enough presence of mind to switch off his own light and to remain quite still.

His face wet with sweat that was cold even in that hot, malodorous cavern he watched as though hypnotised the great nightmare spider slithering across its web towards the *Tardis*. As he watched the two tiny lights vanished; the spider had closed its eyes. He registered this as odd for he saw that even with eyes closed it held steadily on its path directly towards the ship. The creature thought the *Tardis* was its prey; it did not seem even to have seen *him* yet.

The notion galvanised him into action. Pulling the sticky strands of the web from his arms and legs he began to climb towards his ship but on its other side from the approaching monster. That thing, no matter how huge, was still merely a spider and there were ways of dealing with spiders. He climbed doggedly up, his climb made doubly hard by the fact that the great weight of the spinner's vile body was swaying the whole web from side to side. Now the doctor thanked fortune for the sticky substance of the web, spun out of the dreadful creature's own body, for it prevented him from being shaken from his grip. Slowly he climbed, trying not to remember the horror of that monstrous black body, covered with wire-like hairs, those great angled legs, a forest of them straddling the web.

He was only yards from his vessel when disaster came. The whole web shook, the *Tardis* swung round away from him and he saw that the vast round body of the monster swung now between himself and his ship! Breathing heavily and regaining his strength, he noticed a curious thing. The great spider stayed always behind the ship; it never went near the light side. A wild idea came to him, an idea born of that strange notion he had had before, lent added strength by the utter blackness of the cavern and the fact that the brute, even with eyes closed, seemed to sense its way in the darkness. Holding the rope with one hand he stood erect and switched his searchlight on at full strength.

The beam fell full upon that frightful face—if face it could be called. A high scream of agony came from the thing, the legs and feelers drew in and wrapped themselves round the body. Like a titanic ball of black wool it hung motionless now in its own web and Dr Who, wet with cold sweat and trembling in every limb, laughed aloud. So that was the thing's weakness. It could not stand the light. It was cowering from the killing bright light of his searchlight. Holding the beam steady on the thing, the doctor edged his way across the web. He had to pass closer than ten feet to the monster and he almost fainted from the stench and the heat. But at last he made it and regained the threshold of the *Tardis*. He flung himself inside and, rushing to the control panel, pressed the buttons that would close the door against the outside.



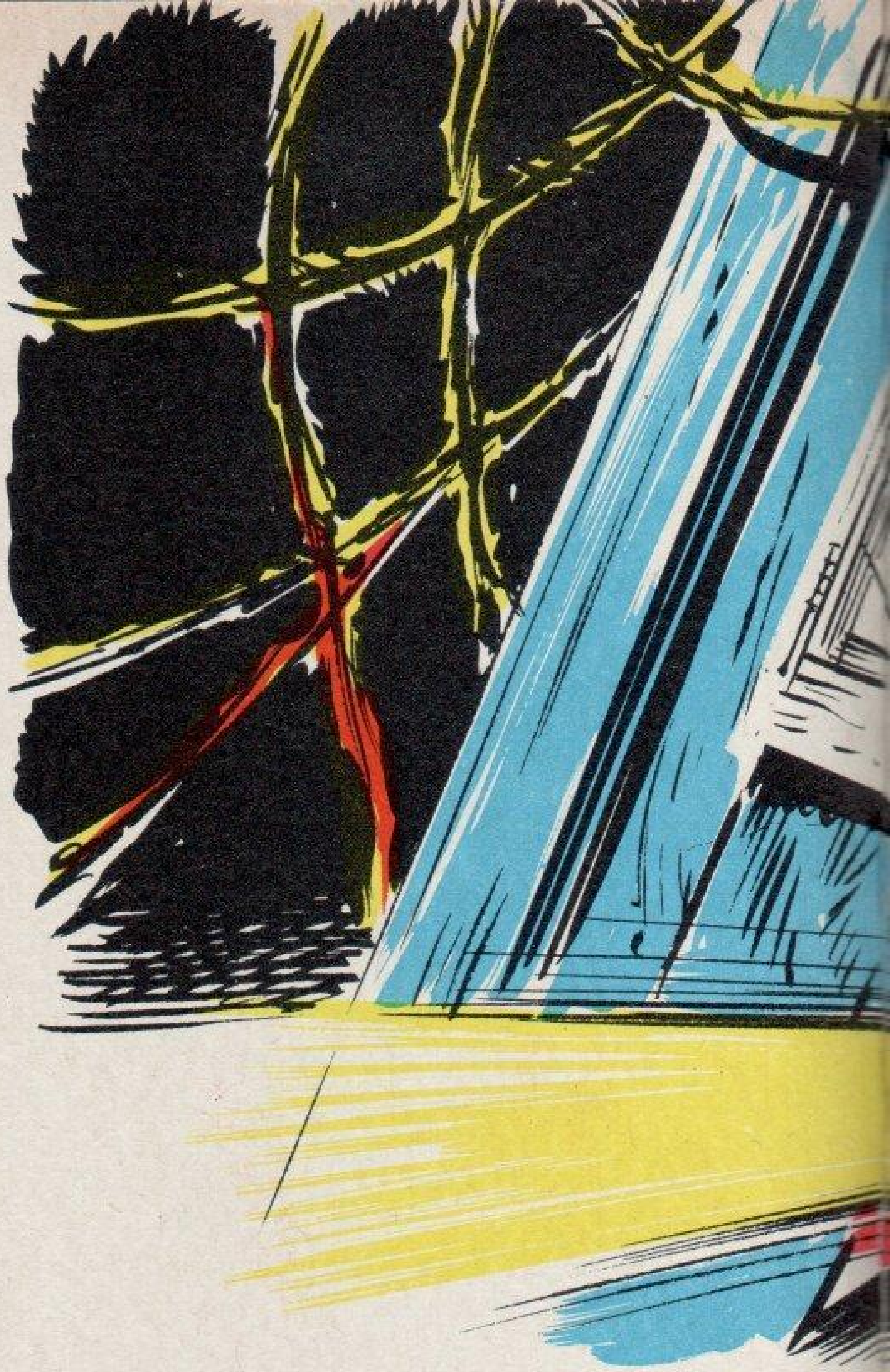
"Goodness gracious me!" he gasped as he flung himself into a chair and relaxed. That monster out there would just have to wait. In the light and familiarity of his ship, his only home, his terror of the thing was lessened. It was after all, he told himself with a chuckle, only an overgrown spider. And in his laboratory he possessed just the very thing to deal with spiders.

* * *

Half an hour later he stood again on the threshold of the swinging *Tardis*, the large syringe in his hand. He wore a makeshift face-mask and the searchlight, at his waist, was switched on full. He swung his body about, searching for his prey, and found it, swinging not twenty feet from his ship, its eyes only half-open and its legs and feelers out. The bright beam again caused the monster to emit the horrible thin scream, close its eyes and pull in its limbs. The stream of prussic acid vapour caught it full in the face. The doctor held his breath as the liquid vaporised, for the home-made mask was doubtful protection.

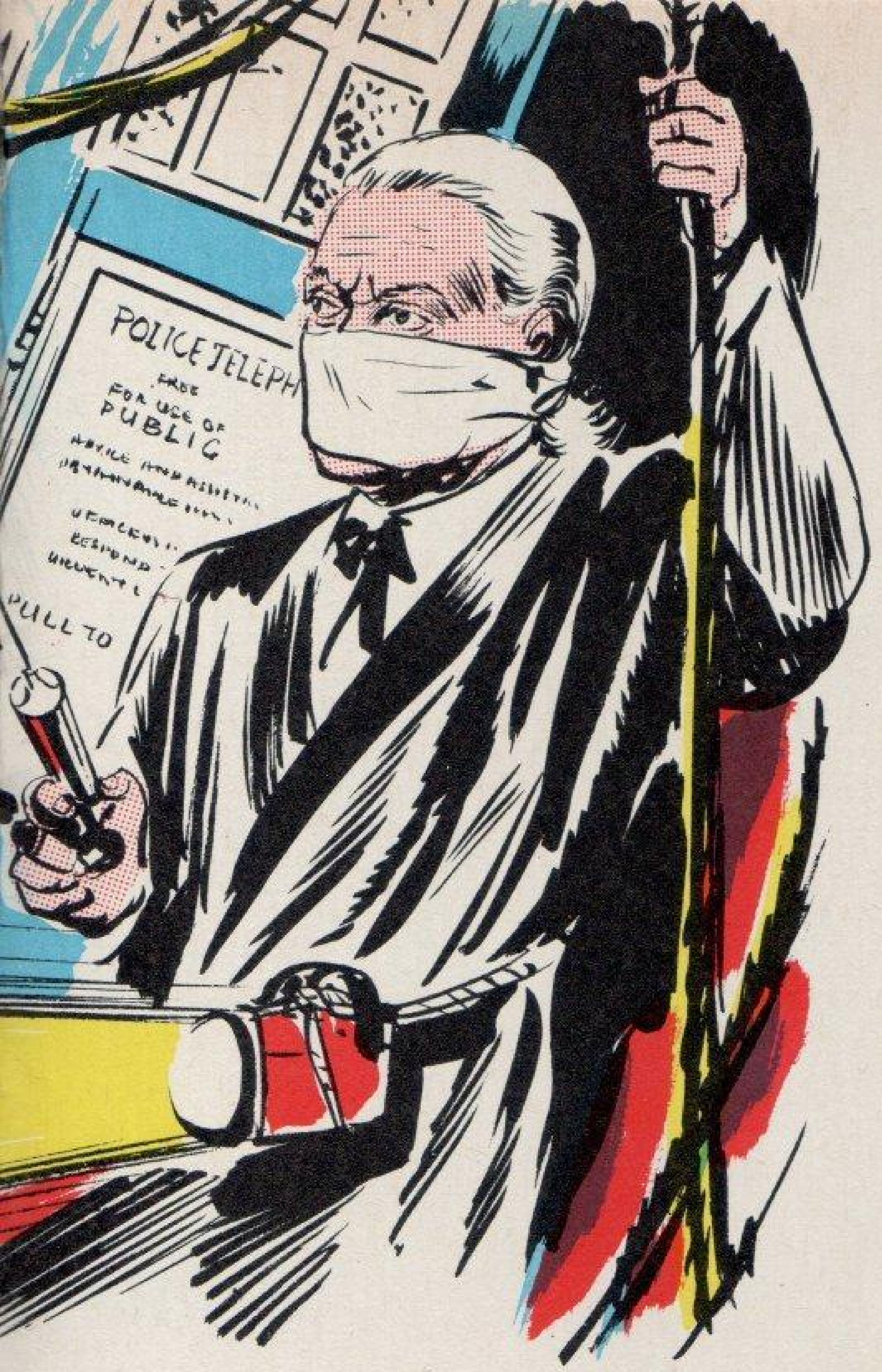
Scream after scream came from that awful mouth as the poison gas enveloped the thing. The body rolled from side to side on the web, and the forest of limbs, long black jointed stalks, thrashed about as the creature's death agony swept over it. It was short, as the doctor had calculated when he had distilled the hell-brew in his laboratory. The limbs went limp and the bulbous body dropped through its own web. With one hand holding firmly to the doorway, Dr Who followed its fall with his light. Its great weight now began to break the strands as it fell and the *Tardis* also was dragged downwards as the great web vibrated and tore at every crosspoint. The ship settled through what was now like a sea of the multitudinous web-strands. He held on tightly until the vessel touched bottom, then he released his hold and stood breathing heavily through his mask. It would not be safe to take it off for some time for the cyanogen was a most pungent and penetrating poison.

He stepped out on to the rock floor and saw the lifeless body of the monster not far away. He swept his light over it and was appalled at its great size. It was all of six feet in diameter and he marvelled at a world which bred such incredible monsters.



The small round porthole drew his attention at once and he walked over towards it, not finding walking any too easy by reason of the rocky ground and the masses of broken web-strands. At last he made it and what he saw almost took his breath away. The door was perfectly round and there was evidence of a hinge at one side. The round door was man-made!

There was no sign of lock or handle and he pushed against it, with no result. He lifted his searchlight and with the battery base he began to hammer on the porthole cover. Instantly it swung open outwards and a flood of bright light shone into the noisome cavern. Without any hesitation at all Dr Who climbed up over the circular rim and dropped down into the bright outside. Anything, literally anything at all, was better than that cavern of total darkness, of stifling heat and foul smells, and of the carcass of the hideous spider, the king of that miserable domain.



He faced bars of some bright metal and beyond that again still brighter light. There were creatures on the other side of the bars and there were sounds coming to his ears, something like the soft twittering of birds. His eyes, aching in the bright glare after the darkness, took some time to focus and in his distress he did not switch off his light or take off his mask.

Staggering to the bars he peered through. There were creatures there, standing facing him in a half-circle. Of about human size, they were covered all over with grey skin and there seemed to be no evidence of clothing. Their egg-shaped heads were entirely bald but straggling beards of grey hairs covered their chins. They had fingers, but of toes there was no sign. Their feet seemed to be webbed or something like the flat pads of animals. But even so, they were humanoid enough for the doctor and he shook the bars and flashed his light, feeble in that bright glare, over the ring of watchers.

"I say, there, whoever you are, let me out of here," he called. "I've had enough of this place. Let me out so that we can talk."

The immediate effect was truly astonishing. The creatures wilted. They writhed and twisted where they stood and on their weird faces came expressions of pain.

"The monster speaks," came in whispers to the doctor's ears. "It came out living from the Zilgan's lair and it is obviously a most powerful monster. We must slay it at once, my brothers, or it will destroy us."

The doctor retreated from the bars, his syringe ready. But first he would try persuasion. He kept his voice soft, for these beings appeared to be extremely sensitive to sound. They were slowly approaching the bars and in order to see better he took off his mask. The effect was quite sensational. All stopped dead and the twittering voice spoke again.

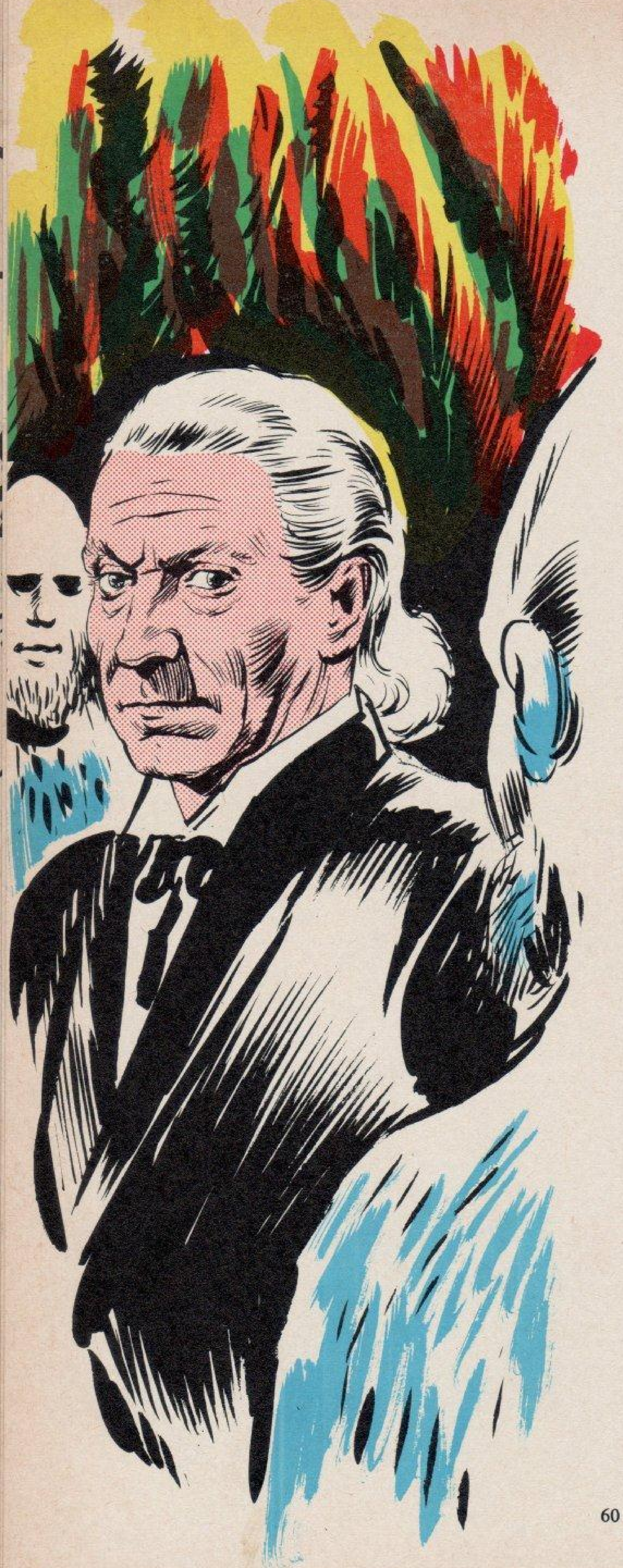
"This monster has two heads," the voice came. "It carries a light but its loud voice and the colours of its body denote a most dreadful monster. It must be destroyed."

Irritated beyond measure Dr Who brandished his syringe and stepped towards the bars, conquering his revulsion at their weirdness.

"I am an intelligent human being," he began in a low tone. "I have escaped from that foul cavern after destroying the brute inside. I am hot and weary; I am almost fainting from the heat in that awful place. If you have any claims to humanity open the bars and let me come out."

This time there was complete silence and it was obvious that the beings were digesting the sense of his words. They appeared to be something like guards to the round door into the cavern, which was too small to permit any of the giant spiders to escape. Or they might be priests attending the altar of that enormous spider, maybe the god they worshipped. They might be the keepers of the spider-house in some strange cosmic zoo. They might be—but here his mind boggled. On a world like this the creatures might be anything of an infinite number of weird and quite unknown things. He watched them closely and then, to his relief and surprise, the bars went up.

They crowded round him, twittering and whispering and touching him. He stood still while they fingered his hanging mask and switched his searchlight on and off. The syringe alone he could not let them touch.



"I am from the planet Earth," he told them firmly, but keeping his voice low. "I landed inside the cavern and I was attacked by the thing in there. I killed it so you need have no further fear of it."

"You have killed it, monster?" came the reply and the doctor now saw that only one of them was speaking. "That cannot be. The Zilgans are invincible. No Sensorite in all our history has *ever killed* a Zilgan. It would be a most terrible sacrilege. You say you come from Earth. Where is Earth? *What* is Earth? It is obvious that you are lying."

Another whisper broke in. "But, Ystal, the monster from Earth *did* emerge from the cavern. Has any Sensorite ever come out alive from any cavern ever before?"

"Oh, don't take my word for it," said the doctor acidly. "See for yourselves. The spider—or the Zilgan as you call it—is lying dead just inside that door. Go in and have a look."

"You are mad, monster," said the one named Ystal. "No Sensorite would ever willingly enter a cavern. Only our vilest criminals are ever condemned to that fate."

"You mean that you deliberately put . . . people . . . in there with those Zilgans?" the doctor said, aghast. "In there with that foul brute, to be killed and eaten . . . ?" His voice trailed away.

"How else will the Zilgans live?" asked Ystal simply. "We make no weapons in our world and the Zilgans are our oldest inhabitants. They must be fed. We put in our criminals and there always seems to be enough."

Dr Who wondered whether his head was spinning round and round as the sense of the doctor's words came to him. He stared in horror at these weird creatures, evidently very far from human. He saw them come closer and closer to him and their numbers had increased.

They overpowered him by weight of numbers and he had no opportunity to use his syringe, even had he been inclined to do so. They handled him gently enough, without any roughness. There were so many of them, so very many of them, he told himself drowsily. And he was so tired, so very, very tired. All he wanted was to stretch himself out somewhere soft and sleep, sleep, sleep, for ever. Their touch was so soft and their faint twittering voices were so soothing . . . so gentle. . . .

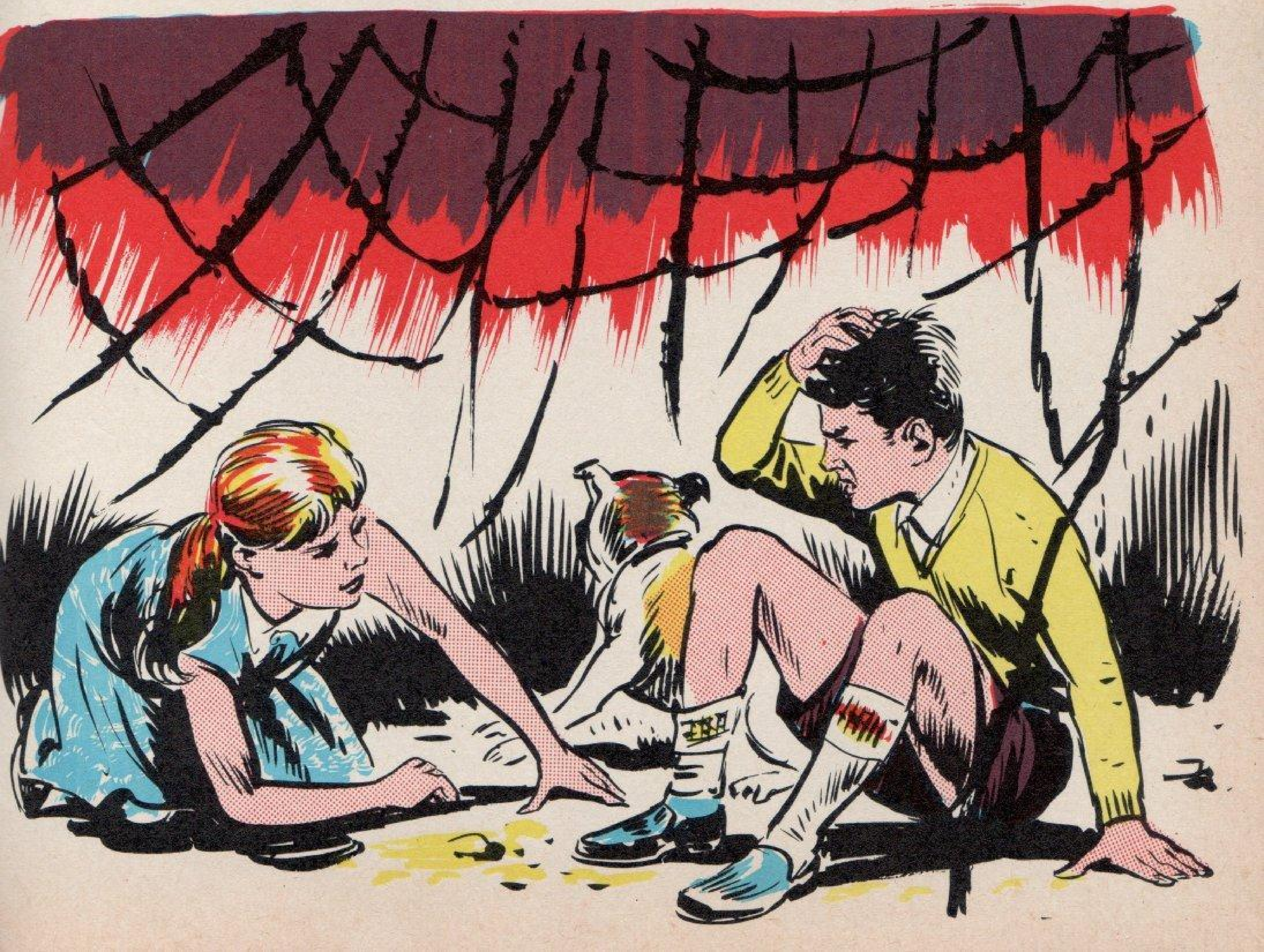
Tony regained consciousness first and he shook his sister into drowsy wakefulness. "There was a man here, Amy," he said excitedly. "A real human man. He looked old and he was talking to himself all the time he was in here. It's a laboratory, you know. I can still smell the stuff—it's like at the dentist's or in a hospital. Chloroform or ether or something. It knocked us both out. He's gone now, muttering to himself all the time. Come on, we've got to follow him."

"I'm still half asleep," yawned Amy as they crawled out from under the bench where they had hidden when they found they could not get out of the room with the electronic lock. The door was now open and they staggered out into the main room of the strange place into which they had wandered. The floor was sloping upwards and as they came in it swung round violently and sent them both flying against a far wall. In its wild plunges through the immense cobweb, the *Tardis* was rocking from side to side, wheeling and turning, and the two children were flung from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling until the breath was all knocked out of them. Then the ship heeled violently over and they were shaken through the doorway out into the darkness and fell through the web, jerking here and there as their fall was broken temporarily by a mass of the strands. Breathless and terrified, they landed on the rocky floor of the cavern and, looking up, they saw the square box, its lights still shining upwards, twisting and turning about as the web, agitated by their fall, swung about.

"Where on earth are we, Tony," gasped Amy, picking herself up. "This is a dreadful place. It's so dark and hot and it smells dreadful."

"I don't think we're anywhere on Earth at all, sis," croaked Tony. "I wish it was a nightmare and that we'd soon wake up. But it's real, that's for sure. That fall would have wakened us up, even after that ether up there. It's real, Amy, we've got to face that. Look, there's light over there, that little round hole. We've got to get out of here."

Tony was out of the round porthole first and he only half heard Amy's cry as he put his leg over the rim. "There's a big black thing lying



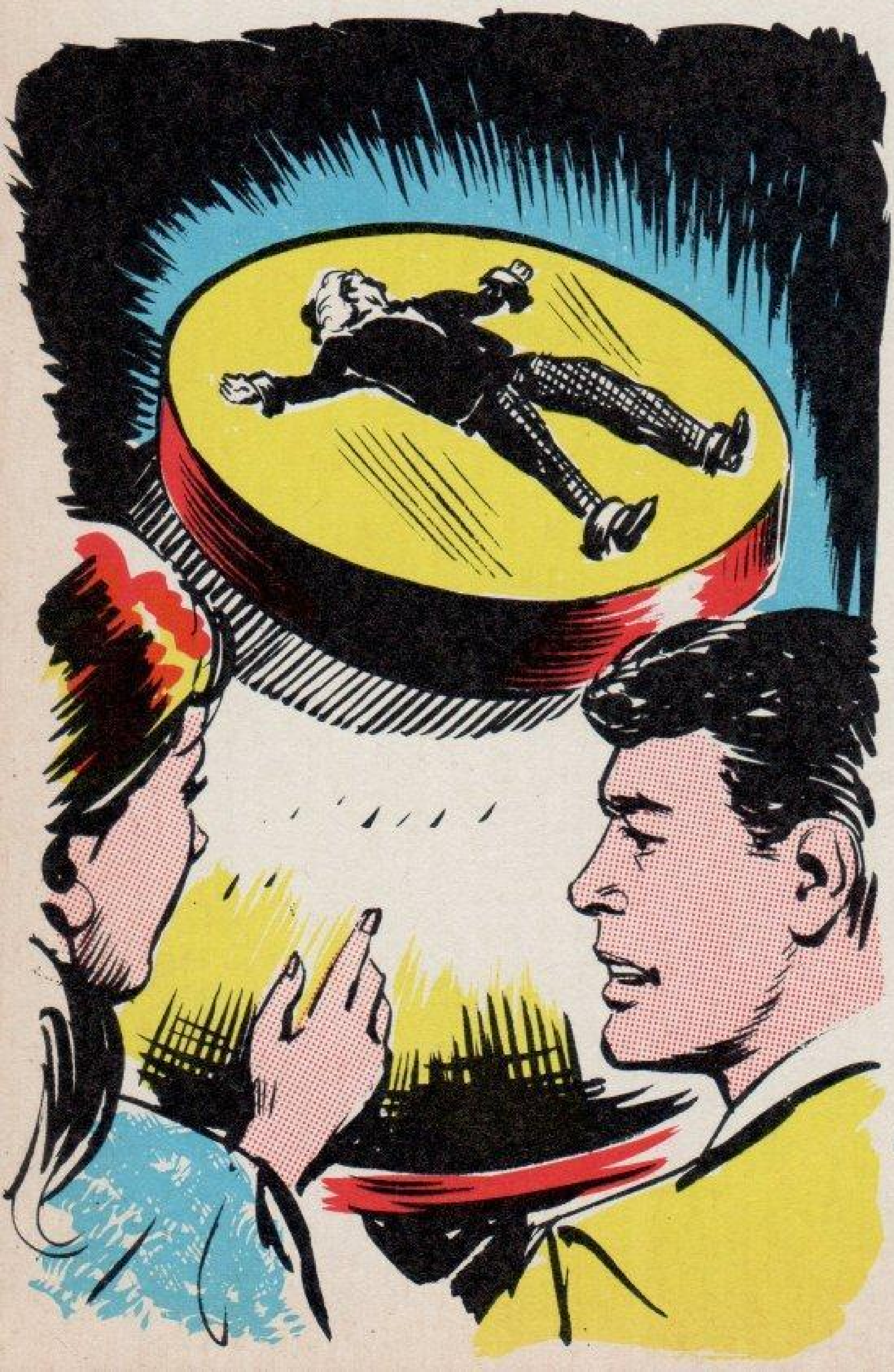
over there, Tony," she shrieked. "It looks like . . . oh, it can't be . . . a terribly big . . . spider . . . oh, Tony, it's. . . ."

"There's two suns out here," yelled Tony excitedly. "Look, Amy, never mind about in there. It's lovely out here. There's two suns in the sky. One's going down and the other's rising. There'll be no night here; it'll always be sunlight."

Out in the bright glare, she forgot that half-seen horror in the dark cavern. They stood on a metal floor and looked round them. They were quite alone and then they heard the excited yapping of Butch. They looked at each other laughing. "We almost forgot him," said Tony and he went back to the porthole. He lifted the dog through and Butch stood shaking himself and looking fiercely round at this strange new place.

"Come on," said Tony. "We'll explore. That old man I saw in the laboratory must be here somewhere. He can't have got far away. I don't think we were unconscious very long."

"I'm scared, Tony," said Amy, her lip quivering. "This place is all so weird and unearthly. We ought to wait here until that man comes back. That'll be his ship in there . . . up there . . . in that awful cave . . . oh, Tony, I saw that dreadful thing in there. . . ."



But her brother was running across the metal floor, with Butch scampering after him. She cast one last fearful glance back at the porthole, then followed him. It was bright out here, bright and warm. She must forget that dreadful, hot, smelly place where there were impossible things.

They came to the great amphitheatre through a narrow underground passage which was the only way out of the bright place of the metal floor. They saw the human figure stretched out on a circular dais at the centre and Tony cried out in excitement. "That's him," he cried. "That's the old man in the laboratory in that telephone-box up there. Now we'll be all right."

Butch was first there and Dr Who roused himself from a stupor to find himself being licked in the face by a dog! The utter strangeness of this in this unearthly place roused him to complete wakefulness. He stared with red-rimmed eyes at the two children.

"Goodness gracious me!" he muttered. "What have we here? I'm in a delirium. It's these two confounded suns. I'm dreaming, that's it. These are phantoms of a nightmare. I'm dying and these are my last thoughts. Earth is so far away and I'm dreaming of the lovely, homely things of Earth, of children and of dogs and. . . ."

"Wake up, wake up, sir," said Tony. "We're real. We were in your box up there in that cavern. We heard you come in then we passed out. There was some sort of gas, like ether or something. When we woke up you'd gone and the box was rolling about and we were thrown out. Where are we and what's happening?"

The doctor lay staring at them only half believing. It was just possible. His mind went back. That common, back on Earth, when had it been, yes, 1966. He'd left the door open. They'd come inside and hidden. The young rascals. . . . Then the hideous reality swamped him. These children were now in the same deadly danger as he was.

"What are these metal things?" asked Amy curiously and the doctor groaned.

"I'm a prisoner of the creatures here," he said. "They've left me here to 'sleep', as if anyone can sleep with these two suns up there. The creatures have never experienced darkness and loud sounds can drive them mad. They aren't human. They serve and worship spiders as big as houses . . . I killed one back in that cavern. . . ." He stopped as Amy's face went white.

"I saw it," she said simply, and her blood ran cold.

"This is a queer place," observed Tony, staring round him. "It looks like a sports-stadium. Look, there's those white block-houses all along the rim. It's very big. Are those the heads of these people along the edge?"

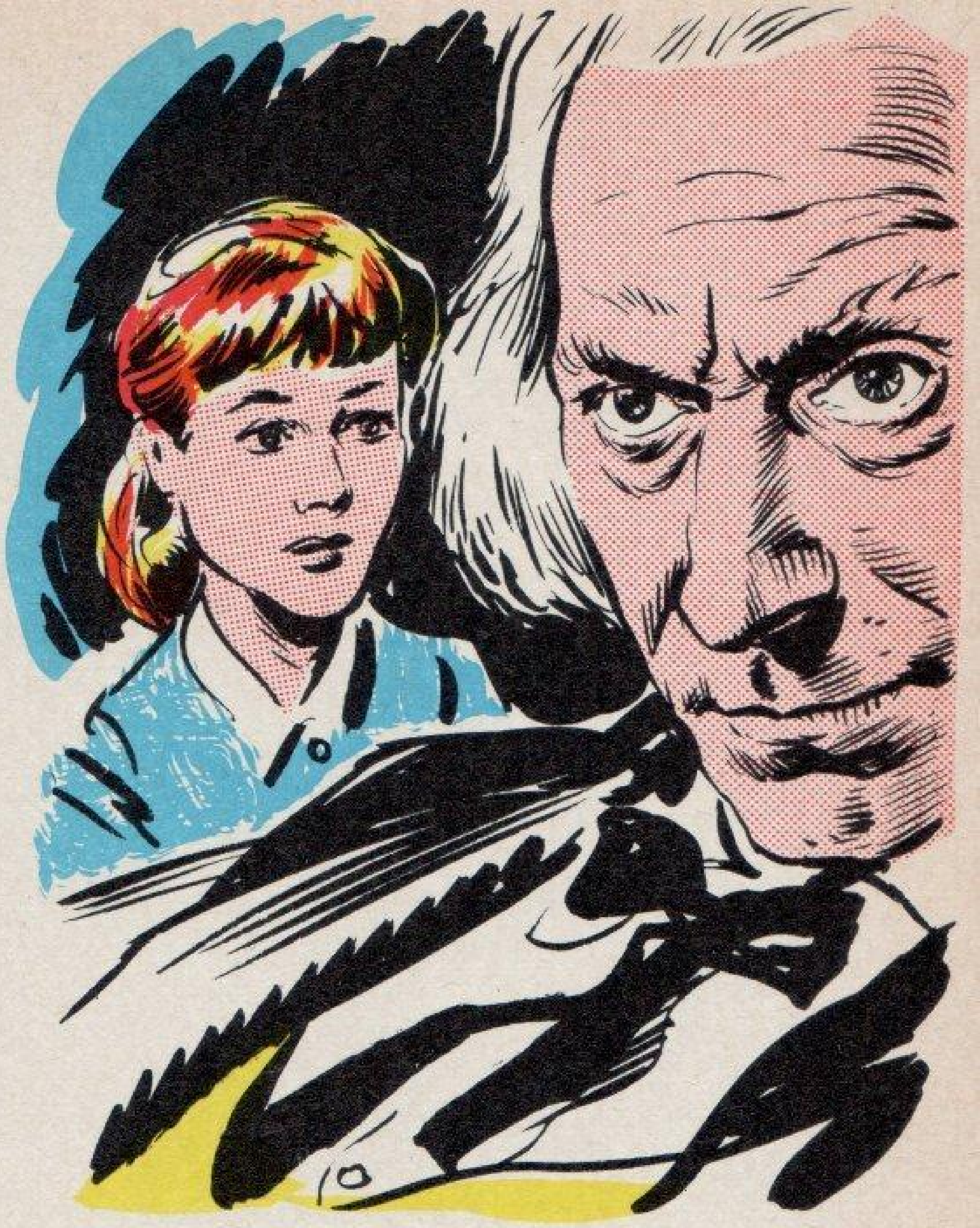
Dr Who only half-heard him. The amazing arrival of these two children and their dog complicated things for him. But it might just be that he could make use of them. The Sensorites couldn't live in darkness, that was one reason why they worshipped the Zilgans. They couldn't stand loud noises, something made them sensitive to it. How could he use those two disabilities in the creatures who had imprisoned him?

"How did you get here?" he demanded and Tony answered, as he held the excited Butch tightly. "We came out of the cavern and across the metal floor. There was an underground passage leading into this. . . ."

"That's it," said the doctor licking his lips. His red eyes shone. "Now, listen to me, you two. We'll all get out of here safely and back to my ship, if you do exactly as I tell you. Go back to that underground place and wait. They'll be coming back for me any time now. I must count on them releasing me from these metal bonds. They'll have to do that if they're going to take me somewhere else. As soon as they do, if they do, I'll give a loud shout. As soon as you hear that, all three of you must come running out, shouting as loud as you can. That dog, does he bark a lot?"

"Butch!" grinned Tony. "He doesn't do much else but bark, and eat, and snap at people's heels."

"Good, good," said the doctor. "It's a chancy plan but it's all we can do. I had a syringe of cyanide gas and a searchlight but they took them away. They have no weapons themselves, at least they said they hadn't. Now, then, we have no time to lose. Off you go, all of you."



"That huge spider in there," ventured Amy in frightened tones. "I've always been afraid of insects. I don't think I could ever go back in there."

"One thing at a time, my child," said the doctor testily. "Let's get free first. Anyway, I killed that monster in there with my cyanide. It's big, I grant you, but no matter how big it is it can't do us any harm when it's dead, can it?"

"There may be . . . more of them," quavered Amy.

"We'll be all right, sis," Tony comforted her. "There'll be three of us and Butch. My name's Tony, sir, and this is my sister Amy."

"I am Dr Who," said the doctor with dignity. "It was a confounded liberty you two children took stowing away aboard my ship but I must confess I'm glad you're here. Without you two, and the dog, I can't see how I'd ever have escaped from these fearful creatures."

"We'll do just as you say, sir," said Tony cheerfully. "Come on, Amy. And I think it's about time you learned that spiders aren't really insects. They're members of the arachnid species. . . ."

"You know it all," she retorted hotly. "Big head, aren't you? Well, spiders are close enough to insects to terrify me. I can't bear anything with more than four legs. Wait for me. . . ."

Alone again and lying in a weary heap, the doctor waited. He had no idea of time in that place of perpetual sunshine. Odd those children turning up like that. This place would be millions of miles from Earth and there they were, two human Earth-children and a dog. Had he been dreaming? Had they really been here and had he talked to them? There was nobody here now. Of course, he was delirious and dreaming. There were no children and no dog. Quite impossible. He was alone and in the power of these inhuman Sensorites. His head was swimming and he felt hot and prickly all over. And hungry and thirsty to distraction.

When the Sensorites came to him again he could scarcely speak to them, so dry and hoarse was his hot throat. But he managed to croak out to them his protests at being imprisoned.

"I say, I say, is this the way to treat a visitor to your world? I demand to be released at once."

One of the Sensorites, taller than the rest, was standing over him.

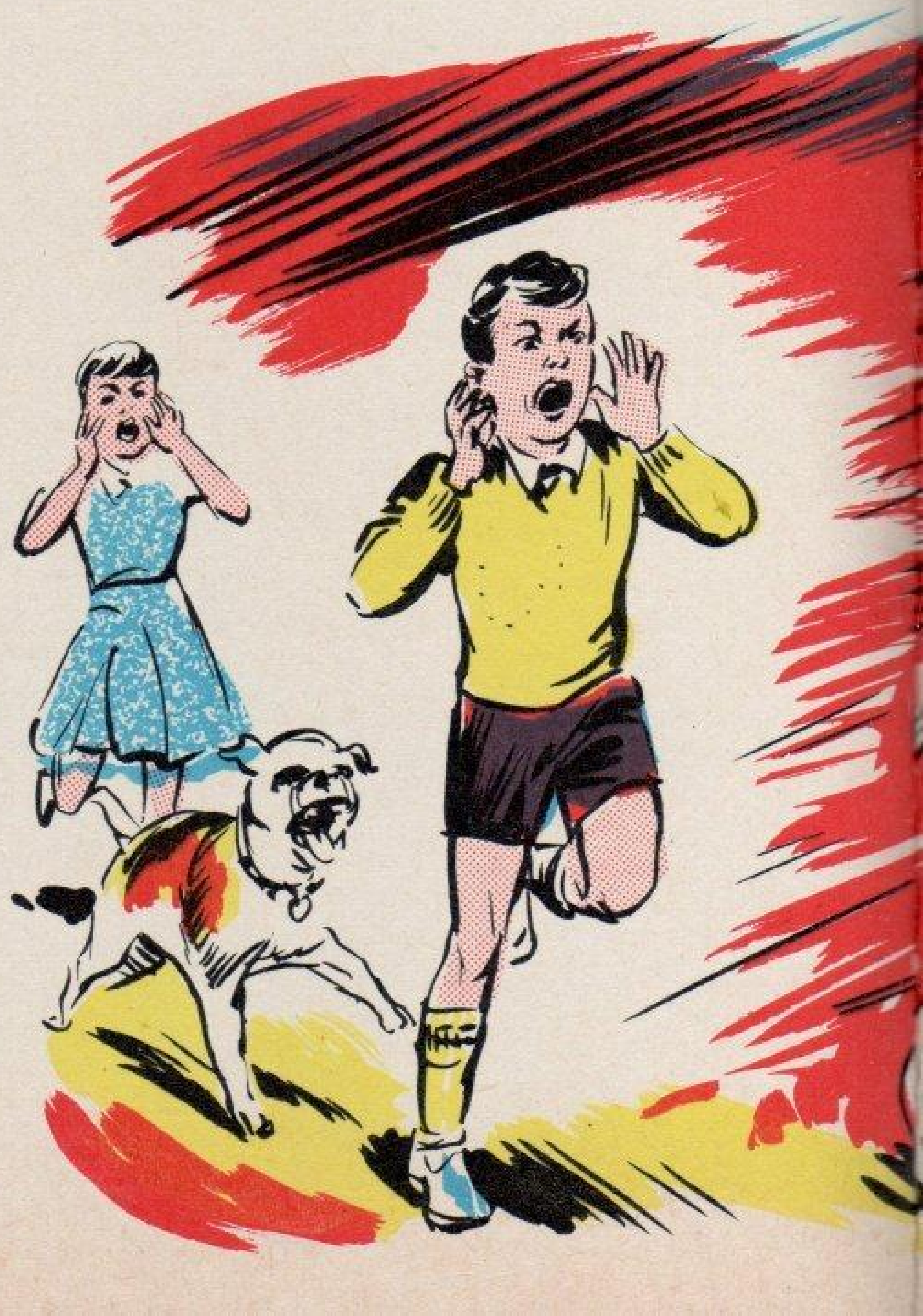
"My followers tell me," this one said in a low tone, "that you have boasted that you killed one of our Zilgans. By your own words you are condemned. No Sensorite ever has, or would ever dare, kill a sacred Zilgan. And as to how you appear here in our midst, again your lies condemn you. How can your ship or anything else, be inside the Zilgan cavern when there is no way out or in to any of the Zilgan caverns except the ports, which we watch and through which we thrust our condemned criminals."

A sudden shiver came over the doctor at the words and the image they recalled. That small round hole and that noisome cavern inside—that monstrous beast there. . . . His head felt as though it was bursting from the strange thick atmosphere and he was very, very tired. But something inside him told him that the matter of his *Tardis* being inside the cave of the Zilgan might prove crucial to him. Better that these creatures think him lying than that they should believe his ship really was there.

"You know," he said muzzily. "If you will release me I can help you. Never in my life have I ever seen or imagined such fearful monsters as those hideous Zilgans. Now, in my ship I have many things, gases, poisons, with which between us we can rid your world of these foul pests."

"You seem determined to make us condemn you," observed the Sensorite. "The Zilgans are our oldest inhabitants. Their persons are sacred and never would any Sensorite dare to attempt to harm one of them, even if that were possible. That you, monster from Earth, could even suggest such a sacrilege, makes it obvious that you must be destroyed at once. You are the greatest menace which has ever come into our sense-sphere."

The doctor lay there in his metal bonds, almost given up to sheer despair. This enigmatical place, with these strange creatures, there would never be any points of contact between him and them. Their world was as utterly strange to him as his would be to them. There were the foul caverns of the Zilgans, obviously sacred shrines to them. The Zilgans themselves, hideous and evil to Dr Who and evidently creatures to be honoured and worshipped by these strange beings. The Zilgans dwelt always in perpetual darkness while the Sensorites lived without ever knowing natural darkness. The thick atmosphere of their world rendered sound-waves dangerous to their heads and maybe their sanity. This weird amphitheatre and those

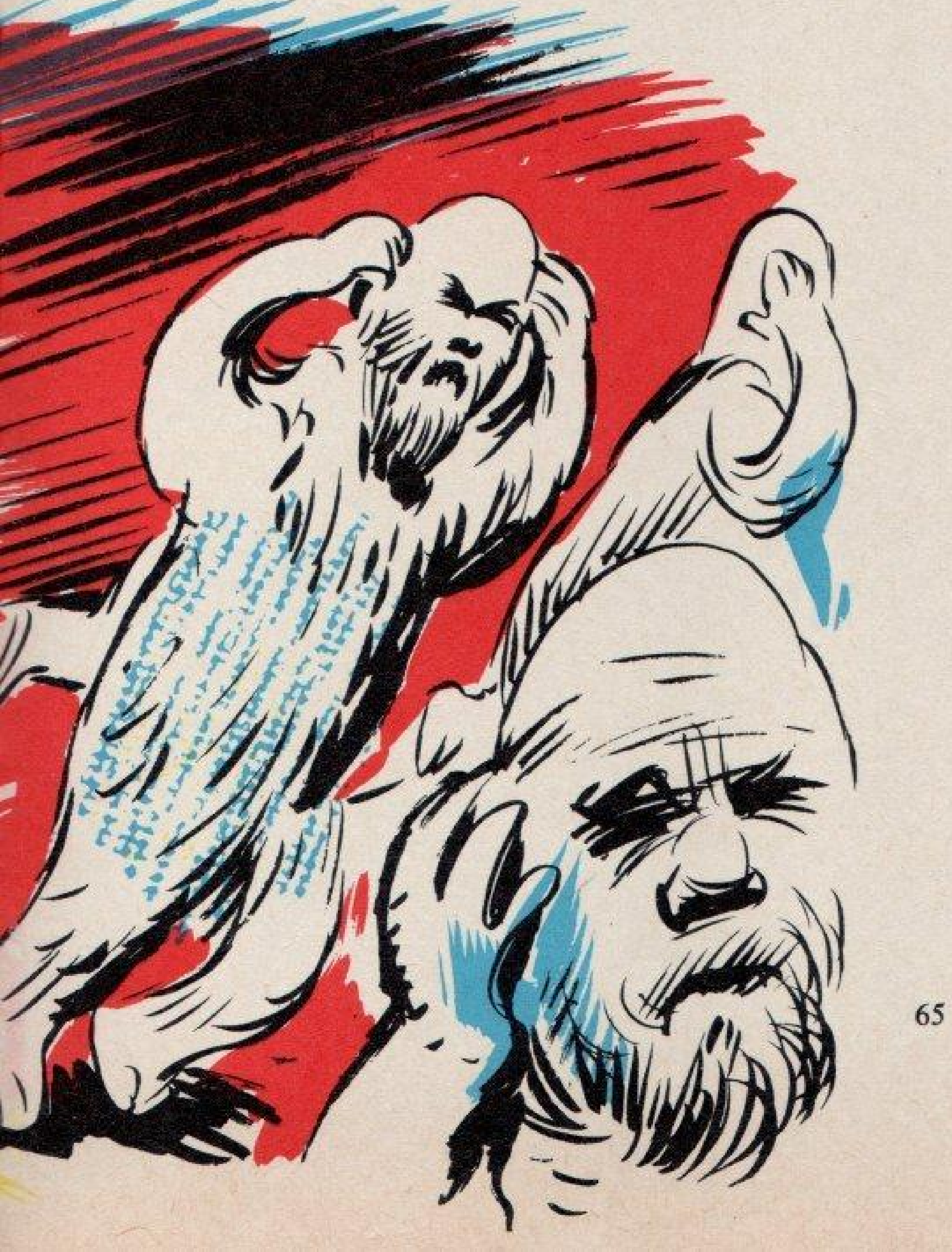


strange white houses on the rims were part of this alien terror.

But a sudden sense of urgency came over him. It couldn't be true. These creatures seemed human enough; they just could not revere those frightful beasts in there. "I can help you kill all the Zilgans," he croaked. "We need nitric acid and alcohol and ether. Have you nitrates and sugar—how much can you get me? Formic acid may be a problem and ether. But between us we should be able. . . ."

"Enough," came the whispered command. "Such dreadful blasphemy I cannot tolerate. You must be destroyed, monster from Earth. There is no other way. We are not cruel or vindictive but you are such a menace to our way of life, that we cannot leave you living."

"They'll squash me just as we on Earth would squash a spider," said the doctor to himself. "Like a tiny, tiny spider. Laughable, really." He wondered how they would kill him and whether after his exposure and thirst and hunger he would still be alive when they got him to the place of execution. There had been that queer dream, of those two nice children and their little yapping dog. A pleasant dream and one which might comfort him on his way out. These people had boasted they used no weapons. How would they kill him? A sudden exhilarating thought came to him. They had told him their custom was to take their criminals to the Zilgan caverns and thrust them inside, victims to the monsters within. Now, that would suit him very well. They had no idea—they did not believe what he said—that his space-ship was actually waiting for him in there. He lay passive waiting. The next words reduced him to despair again.



"We cannot expose our Zilgan to your vicious hatred," said the Sensorite. "Even though we do not believe you can ever harm a Zilgan, yet we dare not take the risk. Some other way of destroying you must be found. Lower the bars."

Shuddering from fear, the doctor had a faint memory. He had told those phantom children something—ah, yes, they were waiting for his signal. As the metal bands loosened from his limbs, he gathered all his strength and uttered as loud a yell as he could manage. Its effect was magical. All the Sensorites cringed backwards away from him.

The doctor's red-rimmed eyes and hazy mind saw a miracle then. Across the floor of the amphitheatre came charging two young children. They were the children of his dream. And the dog was there too, the little dog, yapping and yapping and yapping. The two human children were shouting and howling as loud as they could and all the Sensorites fled in agony, holding their hands over their heads.

He got to his feet and the two children helped him up, the dog scampering at their feet, barking excitedly. They made their way through the short underground passage and came to the place of the porthole. There were other Sensorites there and the humans tottered over towards them, yelling and shouting like wild things. The guards fled from them as from a plague.

"I daren't go in there," said Amy trembling. "I just couldn't look at those dreadful spiders——"

"Nonsense, my child," said the doctor, reinvigorated now that he was free and on the point of deliverance. "Come, hang on to my neck and I will carry you up. You, Tony, look after your little dog."

Then, once again, they were in the hot, malodorous darkness, reaching for the strands of the web, the still-upward gleam of the lights from the *Tardis* their only light.

"Keep the dog quiet now, Tony," warned the doctor as they began to climb. "These creatures may be able to hear—I'm afraid I know very little about spiders and after this the less I discover the better pleased I will be. Are you all right, Amy, my child?"

A muffled reply was the only response and he smiled grimly. It would not be long now until the child's fright would be over. He knew just what she was suffering. Then he heard noises from far aloft and the web-strands moved. It was shaking! They were not alone. There were other Zilgans in here, maybe even larger monsters. How many? Were they the mates of the one he had killed?

He saw two pairs of the faintly glowing eyes, one far to his right and one far to his left but now they had no power to terrify him. He leaped for the web and began climbing, Tony with Butch in one armlock, beside him. The eyes held steady and it was evident the creatures were watching him. Somehow, as they climbed he grew more and more confident that he would make it and escape the loathsome brutes. The web wheeled and swung as they doggedly climbed up it. Their hands repeatedly clung to the sticky strands and as repeatedly they tore them free and climbed on further still. The two pairs of eyes had come no closer.

Twenty feet from the ship his semi-delirious vision caught yet a third pair of eyes and this pair, by their size were either very close or else their owner was colossal beyond all comparison with the monster Dr Who had slain. He yelled out a warning to the boy.

The *Tardis* was between them and this new menace and he cracked on every last bit of energy. A leg, or a feeler, or a tentacle—whatever the loathsome thing was—hooked itself across the *Tardis* as they gained the threshold, panting and half-fainting. The doctor thrust the girl through and pushed Tony and the little dog after her. Then he threw himself into the lighted interior and turning, like a madman began to tear off the tangled strands of cobweb that had drifted against the open doorway.

Then a leap to the controls and the crashing down of feverish hands on the knobs and buttons. The great door closed and from outside they heard a faint cry of shrill agony. Funny thing, he'd never thought spiders made any sounds. . . . His mind rambled on and then they were flung violently about the ship as the *Tardis* first righted itself, then spun round like a boys' top. He realised that the monster out there had gripped the ship in its feelers and was shaking it about as one might shake a pepper-pot.

Holding on for life and slithering over the edge of the panel, he slammed home lever after lever. The ship gyrated like a spinning top, seemed to fall a great distance, then came to a jerking halt. The blackness in his sight-screens faded to the grey of the intra-dimensional flux between the universes where there is no light, no darkness, no heat or life, just nothingness in its most abstract form. Sobbing with relief, he locked the controls and turned wearily to see to the children.

Amy and Tony cowered back against the wall while the fearless Butch pranced round the thing, yapping his heart out. About three feet long and six inches in diameter, it looked like black horn and was covered with thick coarse hairs. It terminated in a cruel, hooked claw and even as his glazed eyes saw it and recognised it as a part of the Zilgan's leg, snapped off by the closing door, the thing twitched, from reflex action. Then even the fearless Butch stopped yapping. But after that it was still. The doctor laughed at the two children.

"A queer souvenir for you two to take back after your trip in Space-Time," he commented in a cracked voice. "Are you both all right?"

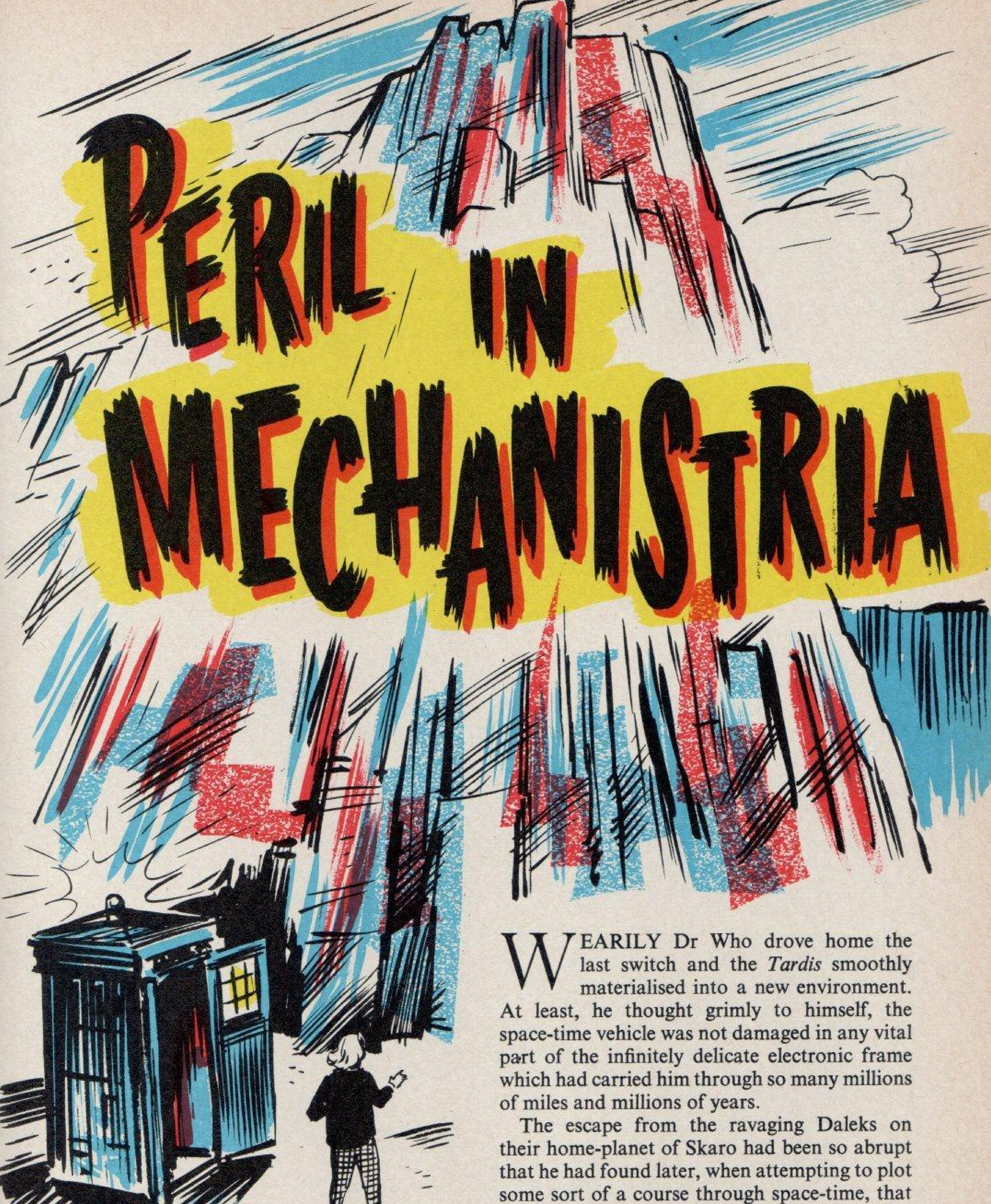
They both heaved sighs of relief. Amy was trembling and Tony was not in much better plight. "I'm glad that's over," they said together.

"Well, now," said the doctor, pursing his lips. "We'll wash up and we'll eat and drink and then I must see about getting you two back home."

"Back home," repeated Amy. "How far are we from home? It seems ages. They'll be furious back there."

Dr Who smiled loftily. "I can take you two and your little dog, who gave such good rescue service back there, exactly to the same minute and the same place as when you so luckily for me stowed away in my ship. Now, let me see. If I recall correctly, it was 1966 and the middle of a thorn-bush on that common. Yes, I've got all the co-ordinates. But, first come, we must eat and drink. First things first, my children."

PERIL IN MECHANISTRIA



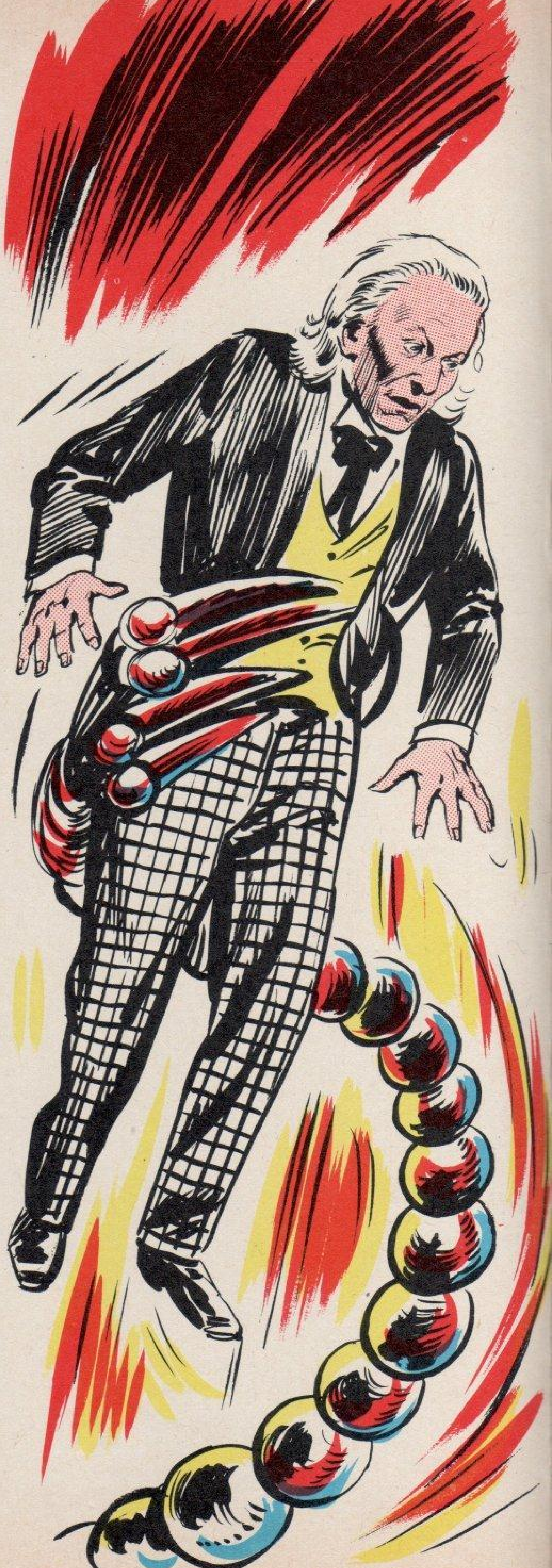
WEARILY Dr Who drove home the last switch and the *Tardis* smoothly materialised into a new environment. At least, he thought grimly to himself, the space-time vehicle was not damaged in any vital part of the infinitely delicate electronic frame which had carried him through so many millions of miles and millions of years.

The escape from the ravaging Daleks on their home-planet of Skaro had been so abrupt that he had found later, when attempting to plot some sort of a course through space-time, that the space-time locator mechanism, though not damaged beyond repair, had suffered so much vibration that he could no longer plot any known course through the multi-dimensions of space and time. In other words, amidst the host of incredible and delicate devices in the *Tardis*, no longer could he be sure where—or when—she had landed.

He sat for a while getting back his strength, aware of a great relief from the incessant vibration of the space-time ship in its headlong travel through the dimensions. In his long and far wanderings, he knew it would be quite impossible to estimate the enormous distances he had covered and the incredible stretches of time through which the *Tardis* had flitted like a ghost, materialising here and there only to plunge him into ever more and more weird and terrifying adventures. Somewhere in the controls there was an automatic log, on the tapes of which all his wanderings would be recorded. Somehow, he had never yet felt the urge to examine the log. What was done was done, he thought. Then, a grim smile touched his lips. That was no longer true, was it? He had travelled to the far distant future and to the far distant past. He himself, his own body, and his marvellous vehicle, had existed in many places in the universe, long before his own time when the vehicle had been built, and again long millions of years after she would have ceased to exist in her own space and time. He had never attempted to solve the paradoxes of the *Tardis*; it was just not possible.

Rested now, he rose and snapped on the switches of the screens. At least he would see where he was even if vision from inside would give no clue to the time element. The screens dissolved into the whorls of oscillations and then the picture grew. Or at least, the picture should have grown and steadied but now it did not. He was busy at the controls for a while, and still the screens showed nothing but the featureless blackness into which he was gazing.

A new wave of weariness swept over him and he snapped off the switches. The problem was too much for him now. He would eat and sleep again before attempting the solution. Satisfying himself that the *Tardis* was actually resting on solid substance, he went round the circular control panels, switching off all the machines except those which gave him air and food and water. After a meal and a sleep he would feel better able to face whatever perils



and uncertainties this new and unknown sphere would present.

When he woke up and switched on the screens again the solution came to him at once and he laughed to himself. As simple as that. He had landed during the night of this world and now it was daytime.

Certainly it was daytime outside. A pale yellow sun was rising over towards the horizon in the starboard screen. Gradually as he watched it began to light up the landscape in the view of the outer lenses. It was an odd landscape but Dr Who was used to oddness. It seemed that anywhere and anywhen he went in the universe, everything was strange and different to every other place and time.

Quite featureless it looked. There were no trees, in fact there seemed to be no vegetation visible anywhere he looked. The ground looked black and there was a slight shimmering from its smooth surface. His hand went to the controls of the door. The screens told him so little that he knew he must now face the always chancy opening of the great door.

The first thing that hit him as the great door swung open was the noise. Like a great wave it fell upon his ear-drums and battered into his consciousness. It was not exceptionally loud and seemed to resolve itself into a more or less steady hum. There was a beat in it also, a steady crunching beat that rose and fell and rose and fell again and again and again. He walked to the doors and looked out.

The surface rang to his feet as he walked out of the *Tardis*. Metal! The ground was metal, smooth featureless metal that was fundamentally black but which gave out that faint shimmering that was almost, but not quite, a glowing. He moved forward a few feet and turned back to look at his ship. Then he stood stock-still as the enormity of the thing overwhelmed him.

The *Tardis* was nestling against the side of what looked like a gigantic metal mountain. The port screen had been so close to its upward-sloping surface that it would have given no view even if he had looked at it. The metal mountain sloped upward and upward so that he found himself leaning backwards to see its summit. Thus he had no warning of the sudden peril that was upon him. A thunderous beat and a great clanking of metal was his first evidence and he whirled round swiftly. Across the metal plain there was approaching him something out of a nightmare, something of which there had been no parallel in all his space-time wanderings.

It was round and it was black. It had wheels and it had legs. There were portholes in the thing and from within lights flashed on and off. It was coming towards him but he could never be certain afterwards whether it came on the wheels or on the legs. He stood rooted to the spot and watched it approach, like a hypnotised rabbit watches the approach of the cobra.

For a moment he considered retreat to the *Tardis* but knew that he would never make it. He had come too far and the smooth metal surface on which he stood would make very poor running ground. He had no weapon and indeed, what weapon would be of any use against this thing, this monster, this creature, if it was a creature. It was almost upon him now and already he could see long jointed metal cables or tentacles emerging, to grab him surely. This thing must be a monstrous robot, a gigantic grappling machine, alongside of which the dreaded Daleks would seem like children's toys. This time, it seemed, his wanderings were at last to end. There could be no salvation from this thing. It would crush him like a fly, it would smear him lifeless on the metal ground of this weird world.

At first, he thought that the thing which coiled round his waist was one of the tentacles of the monster whipping out towards him. Then his feet left the ground and he was whirled up, up, up, into the sky, in a sickening curve that lifted him far above the *Tardis*, the metal monster and the metal plain. The breath was knocked out of his body and the last thing he was conscious of before blackness swept over him was the all-pervading smell of oil and the smallness of the erstwhile titanic machine down there. The *Tardis* itself was so small that it could no longer be seen at all.

* * *

He awoke to darkness and glimmering firelight. He awoke to a ring of pale faces, some bearded and some cleanshaven, some men and some women. The relief was so great that he gave a great gasp of content. There were people on this weird planet, actual living people like himself. These would be the masters of the machines of this world. The monster which had attacked him must have broken down and run amuck and he had been rescued. He sat up and smiled round at his rescuers.

"You came in the nick of time," he said. "I had given myself up for lost, you know. That frightful thing out there, what is it? Some sort of agricultural machine, no doubt. Highly dangerous, I should say. You should keep such monsters in better control, you know." He screwed his monocle into his eye and beamed round at them benevolently.

There was no immediate reply from the ring of faces. They stared at him as though it was he who was the monster. Then one of them spoke and the voice was so loud that Dr Who flinched. The one who spoke was a bearded man who looked about his own age; one of the Elders, no doubt, thought Dr Who to himself. But what a truly scruffy lot they looked, these people he was assuming were the masters of this planet and its weird machines.

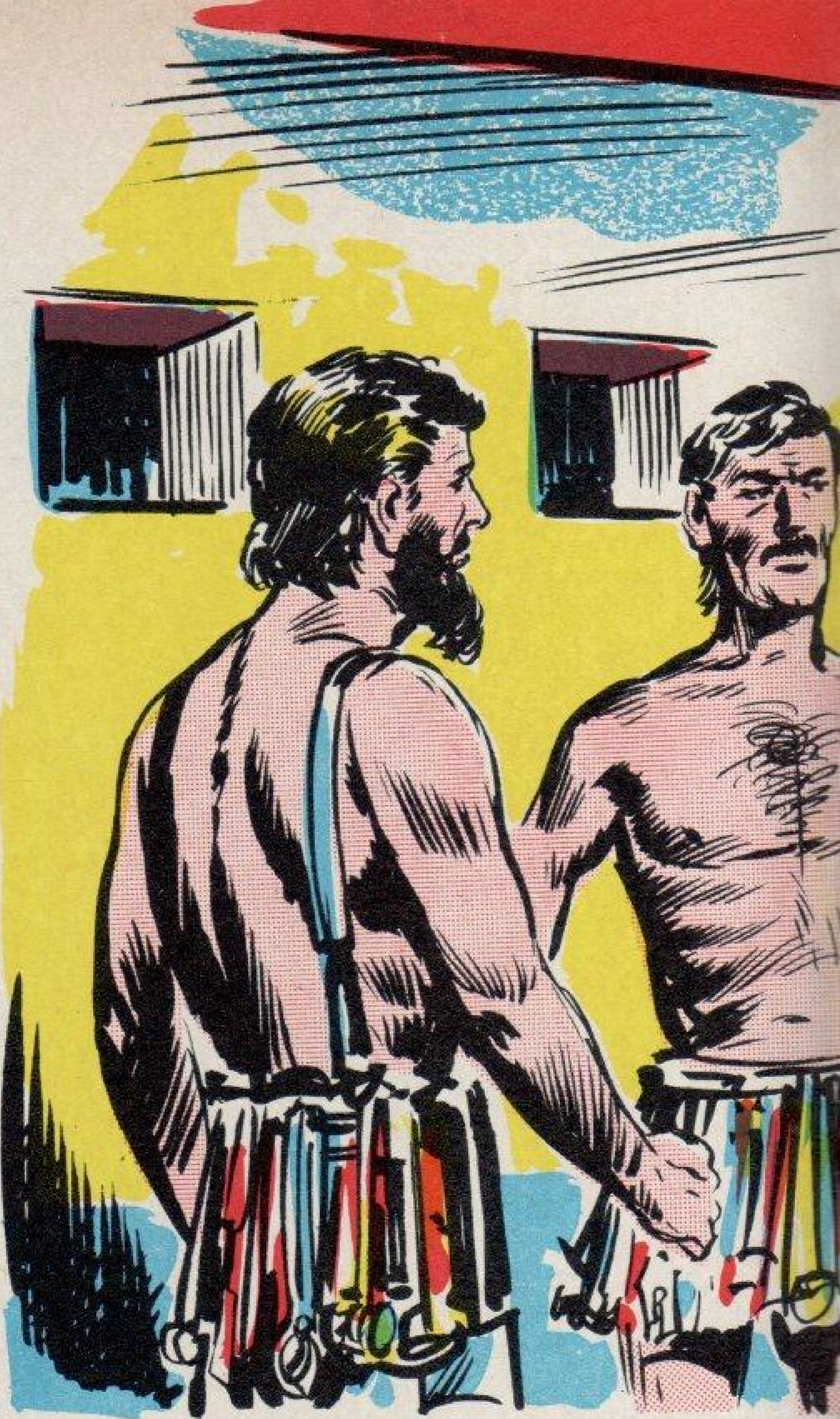
"Who are you?" came a deep voice. "Where have you come from?"

"Oh, I'm a traveller," replied Dr Who airily. "I'm a visitor to your world and I must say I find it a very odd sort of place. That metal monster down there—what was that? By the way, I must really thank you for your speed and bravery in rescuing me."

"Bravery," asked the man. "What is that? As to the machine, it is nothing. You were in its way. That proves you are a madman. No one but a madman would stand in the path of a Grukker."

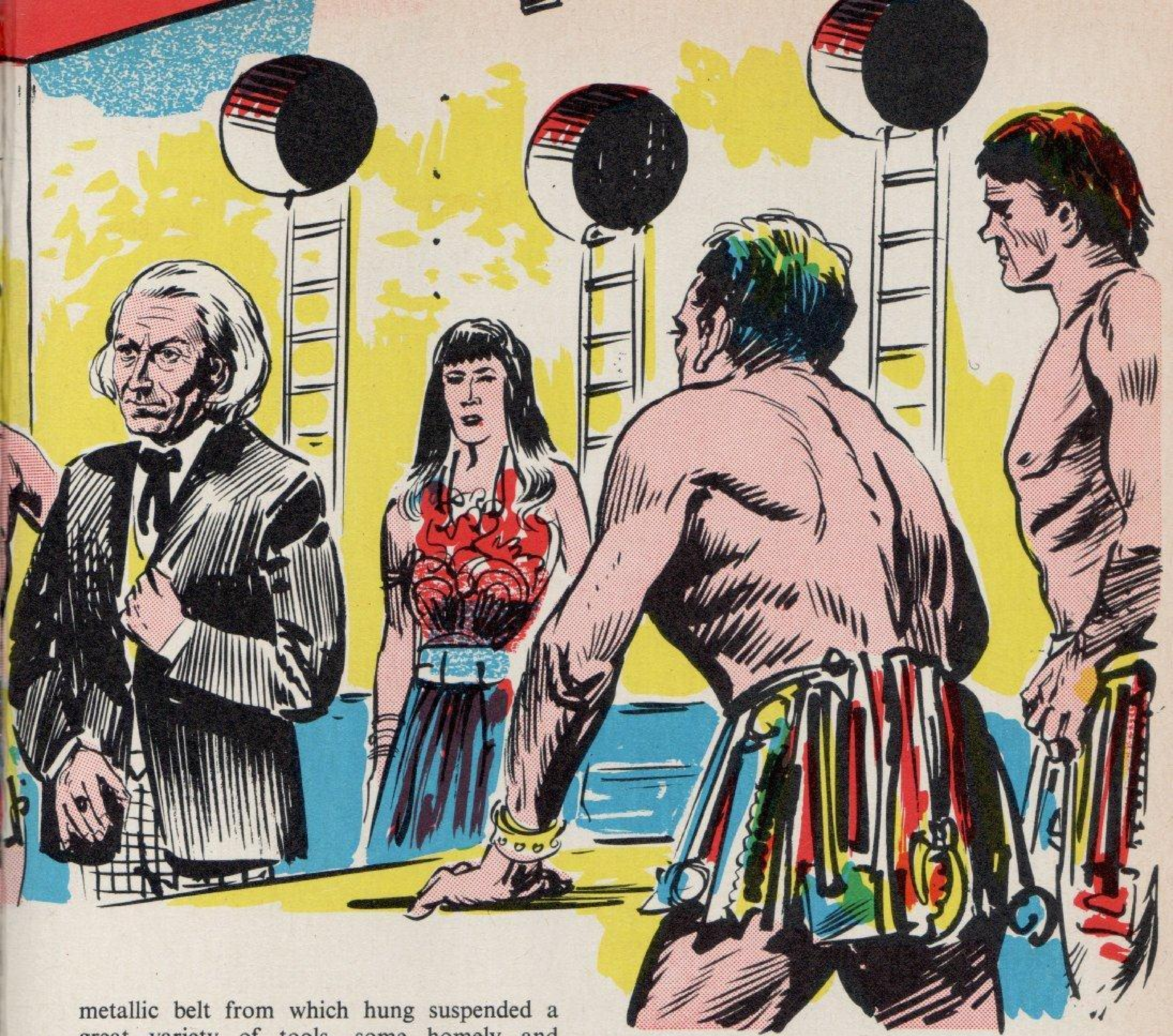
"I can assure you, sir," said Dr Who stiffly, "that I am not mad. I am merely a peaceful visitor to your world. Now that you have so kindly saved my life, I must repay you. What can I do for you in return, or should I go to your government?"

"You must talk much louder," said the bearded man. "We can hardly hear you. Some of us, however, have become expert in lip-reading. You say you are a visitor to our world. That alone tells us you are mad. Tell me which Haven you have wandered from; we will return you there. But any Korad who is astonished and afraid by the sight of a Grukker must be a very strange Korad indeed."



"I can assure you, sir," said Dr Who in a louder voice, "you are talking in riddles. I know nothing of this talk of Havens and Grukkers. To me this seems a very odd world indeed you have here. Where is the soil, the seas, the grass and the trees——"

Now there was a silence, so sudden that he himself stopped. All the people who surrounded him leaped away from him as though in terror. But he noted that they displayed no weapons and that what he had first taken for terror in their faces might more easily be thought of as worship. As they stood off from him he chanced a glance round the place. It was like the interior of a large metal box. Ladders ran up one side of the wall and there were holes in the walls here and there. Just like a rookery, he thought to himself. There were quite a few of the folk in the big metal room and they were unclothed except for a harness-like outfit comprising a broad



metallic belt from which hung suspended a great variety of tools, some homely and recognisable, like screwdrivers and hammers, and some which by no stretch of the imagination, could he guess their use. There were men and women amongst them, and some children and he noted that even the children wore the belt with the tools. Large windows at one side of the hall let in the pale light of the sun.

He began to stroll over towards the windows and as he moved, so the tight ring of people surrounded him. On a sudden impulse he made to break through the ring and found it useless. They just would not let him through. He turned on them angrily.

"And what, may I ask, is the meaning of this?" he barked at them. "A poor thing, I must say if, after rescuing me you treat me like a prisoner. Well, if I am a prisoner, even a prisoner can expect food and drink, I suppose."

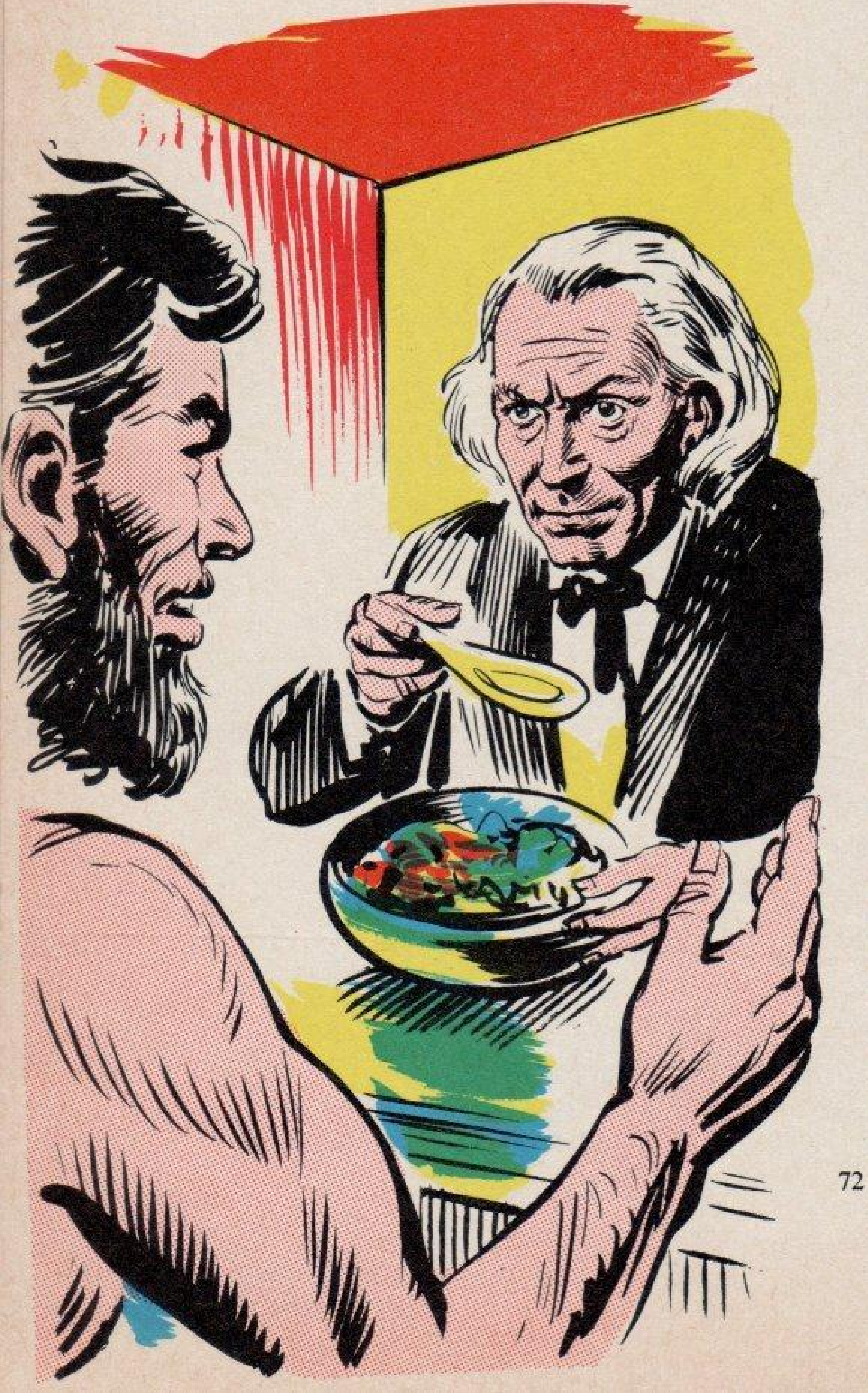
By this time he was used to speaking in a loud voice, as did all the others apparently. This was obviously due to the incessant racket and beat of the machinery that filled the air. He supposed that one might eventually get used to this but it was all very tiring.

Then the bearded one came forward and took him by the arm. "We are forgetting our humanity," he said in a loud voice. "Come, there is food and drink here and we will give you sleeping quarters. But first, we have sent word to Haven One and presently the Wise Ones will come and speak to you. We are nothing but provincials and much of what you talk means nothing to us. You spoke of soil and sea, of grass and trees. Now just where did you hear of such things?"

Dr Who sat down at the table on which dishes were placed. He tasted the food, a pleasant enough mushy green porridge, and drank of the clear water in the beaker of glistening metal. With his mouth half-full, he waved a hand to the table. "Why," he said, "why, this food comes from the soil, doesn't it? This water came originally from the sea, didn't it?"

The bearded man looked strangely at Dr Who and took a step backward.

"You can only be one of the Wise Ones," he said. "Though which Haven you come from I cannot tell, nor why you wear such outlandish garments. The food you are eating was made for us by a machine. The water you have drunk was synthesised from its chemical elements. There is no soil or sea on Korad, nor is there grass or trees. In fact, I doubt whether nine-tenths of we Korads have ever heard of such things. It is only the few of us who have visited other Havens who have heard talk of such things and then only as legends."



Dr Who looked at him shrewdly. A suspicion, which had first come to him when he had stepped out of the *Tardis*, now came back to him. The metal plain, the metal mountain, the vast walking mechanism, the smell of oil, the all-pervading racket of machinery. It could have only one meaning. This planet—Korad the old man had said—was nothing but a gigantic workshop. But that nonsense about the soil and the sea, the grass and the trees, that was too stupid even to consider. He had blundered into a group of witless mechanical slaves of a very highly developed mechanical civilisation. He must meet their head people. This might well be a planet on which, by their very advanced technology, he might be able to perform certain very essential repairs to the *Tardis*, so badly damaged by her long and distant voyagings. He decided that he must attempt to humour these ignorant savages. He gave an engaging smile.

"I will indeed welcome a meeting with these Wise Ones of yours," he observed pleasantly. "Will they come here or must I go to them?"

"They will come here," was the reply. "My name is Drako and I am the leader of this Haven. It was I who detected your presence and sent the rescue. To us it seemed as though you had blundered into the path of the Grukker when you emerged from your strange little box."

"But how did you rescue me?" protested Dr Who. "I felt a rope or a tentacle whip round my waist——"

"We used a handling tentacle, of course," was the puzzled reply. "Have you nothing like this in your Haven. Of course, when I saw you in the Grukker's path I had to send a soarer to pick you up. I could as easily have lifted a ten-ton bar of metal." There was a puzzled frown on his face as he studied Dr Who's bafflement. "Just where *have* you come from? It is time we knew, before the Wise Ones arrive."

"I have come from——" Dr Who stopped. What should he say? What *could* he say? His far distant and endless wanderings had taken him into so many strange places in the universe that his origins had almost been forgotten. Drako's face was watching his closely and for a moment Dr Who thought he detected a sudden flash of cunning in the eyes.

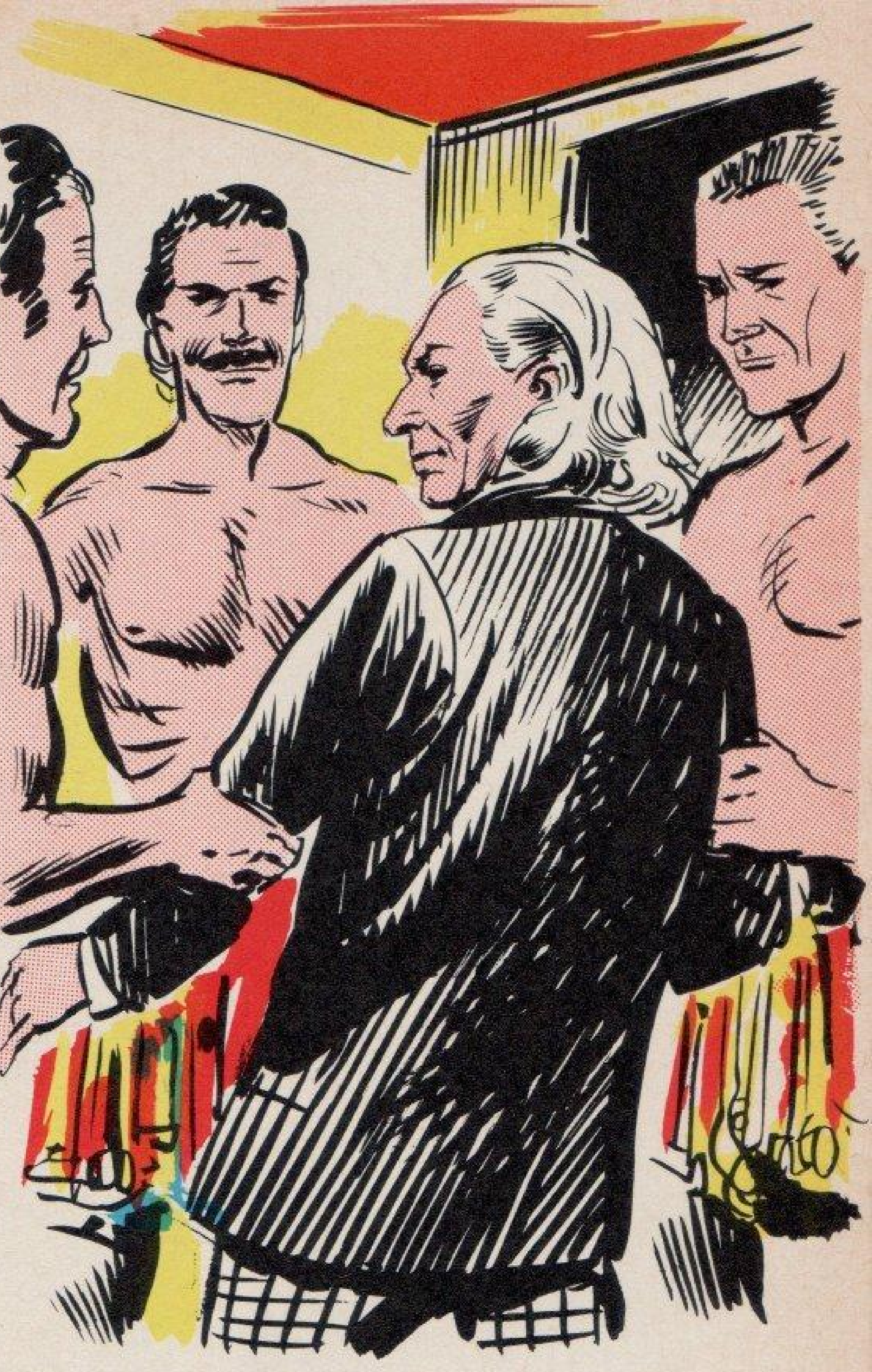
"That strange box you walked out of," Drako pressed on and Dr Who could see that many of the others, all men this time, were pressing round to hear. "That tiny thing down there beside the synthesising machine. Is that your ship? There is no soarer on Korad anything like that?"

He stopped and there was utter silence around Dr Who, a silence only around him of course, and he was interested to note that by now he was almost not noticing the ever-present noise. He preened himself and replaced the monocle in his eye. At last he had all their full attention and he would tell them something.

"That is my *Tardis*," he said primly. "Many, many years ago—I suppose you could say many millions of years ago, she was built by a race of men so advanced and so great-minded that she was designed to travel anywhere in the space of the universe and backwards and forwards across the great span of time, time past and future time. In my *Tardis*, I came to your planet——"

Then he stopped, appalled by what he was saying. These people were ignorant savages it is true, yet they were mechanics, they knew machinery and technology must be in their blood. He must say no more. They must never learn the secrets of the *Tardis*. To no one in all his wanderings had he ever revealed or betrayed any of the wonders of which the little ship was capable. "But," he finished firmly, "I am tired. I will sleep now. We will discuss this later."

From the tight ring of faces which now seemed a little more sinister even than before, there came no reply. His heart suddenly misgave him. He had, after all, in his vain glorious folly, said too much. They had guessed the powers of his ship. They would use it to travel to other worlds and other times and thus upset the workings of Destiny. Or they would tear her apart seeking the secrets she held. And he would be marooned here for ever on this inhospitable metal ball, the victim of malevolent machines, millions of miles from his home and millions of years from his epoch. Feebly, he put out his hands to hold them off but they were too many. They overwhelmed him very quickly.



They handled him gently enough and it was evident that they considered him no ordinary prisoner. He was hustled up one of the ladders and thrust inside one of the holes in the metal wall. It was evidently a sleeping place and they laid him down on a pallet. Drako followed them and looked down at Dr Who.

"Here you will be safe until the Wise Ones come," he said. "There will be much to discuss between us and they will know best what is to be done with you."

Dr Who started to speak, then closed his lips. He stared angrily up at the bearded man. He had already said too much, now he must bide his time and wait until an opportunity arose which would help him to escape and regain the *Tardis*. For by now he realised that this planet was no fit resting place for him. And the great door of the *Tardis* was open as he had left it. These people knew where she lay; they had evidently seen it on some sort of sight-screen. He could only hope that the superstitious fear he had sensed in their manner would stop them from touching the vehicle.

Darkness fell in the big hall and lights sprang up. His guards, two husky young Korads, made no attempt to hinder him as he peered out at the scene below. There seemed to be a continuous coming and going of these strange people. Gangs of them departed through small doors while others climbed up into their sleeping rooms. At intervals of several hours this sort of thing went on and he realised that his first guess had been correct. These folk were mechanics, workers in some mysterious workshop, coming and going from their shifts of work.

His guards too, shared shifts, and he was bitterly disappointed when, after seeing one of them yawn in a quite human fashion, shortly afterwards they were relieved by two new ones. Peevishly, he threw himself down on the pallet and forced himself to sleep. If he was to face new and unknown perils he must have all his strength.

When he woke he sat up to face Drako, who was squatting beside the pallet. "We must talk," said the man urgently and his voice was not as loud as before, for in the sleeping hole the noise did not penetrate so much. "Before they come, we must decide what to do about you and your strange box. You must tell me all about it, its powers and what it does. There is one amongst us who was watching the metal synthesiser and saw your box suddenly appear. We do not believe in magic on Korad. So you must tell us."

"You would never understand," replied Dr Who coldly. "There are principles in its construction that you would never understand in a thousand years. We will wait until your Wise Ones come. You people seem to me to be nothing but ignorant savages, mechanics though you do appear to be. Your masters will know what I am talking about."

Drako did not appear to be insulted by his cold words. Instead, his bearded face broke into a smile, the first Dr Who had seen there.

"The Wise Ones," Drako said, "are not our masters. There are no masters on Korad but the machines themselves. We both serve them and live by their benevolence."

Dr Who was astonished. "The machines are your masters!" he repeated. "That cannot be possible, you know. Machines are merely mechanical *things* made by the brains and hands of men. You talk nonsense."

Drako looked at him strangely. "You do not know our world, that proves what you told us, that you came from . . . from . . . elsewhere. The machines of Korad are the true masters of this world, stranger. All of us people, we the mechanics and the Wise Ones also, serve them and live only because they have use for us."

Dr Who stared at him impressed by his tone of voice. "If this is true," he said thoughtfully, "why have you never revolted? I find it quite incredible to believe that a race of men, thinking human beings, can remain in subjection to mere unthinking metal mechanisms. How long has such a state of things been going on?"

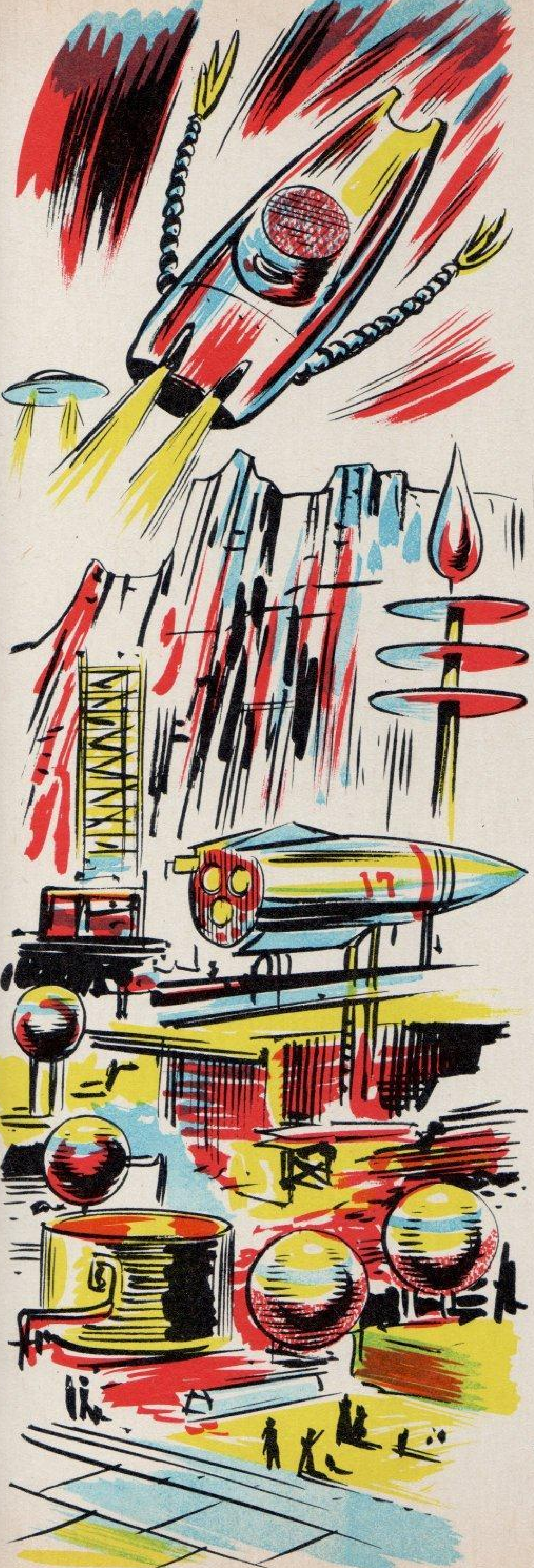
Drako shrugged his shoulders. "No man knows. It goes back far beyond our earliest legends. It has always been so. There are dim tales of revolts in the far distant past. All ended as soon as they started. But I have been thinking of them last night. Now that you have come a new and a wild thought comes to me. With your machine we might perhaps escape from Korad. There were words you used, only a few of which I recognised. You spoke of places far distant and of times before this and after this. I am confused. I cannot grasp the thing. Will you tell me?"

The question was asked so simply and straightforwardly that Dr Who pursed his lips and gazed intently into the other man's eyes. There had seemed to be cunning there before, now there seemed to be a pleading. Could he trust this man? Could he tell him some, at least, of the secrets of the *Tardis*?

Drako spoke before he could reply. "I will tell you all we know. For as long as the very oldest amongst us can recall, things have been like this. We are born into this life and for most it is enough. The great machines were built so very long ago that no man knows the purposes of most of them. There are some which synthesise our food and our water and the tools we must use. Of the others we know nothing."

"These Wise Ones," put in Dr Who, "how do they fit in?"

Drako's lip curled. "The Wise Ones," he

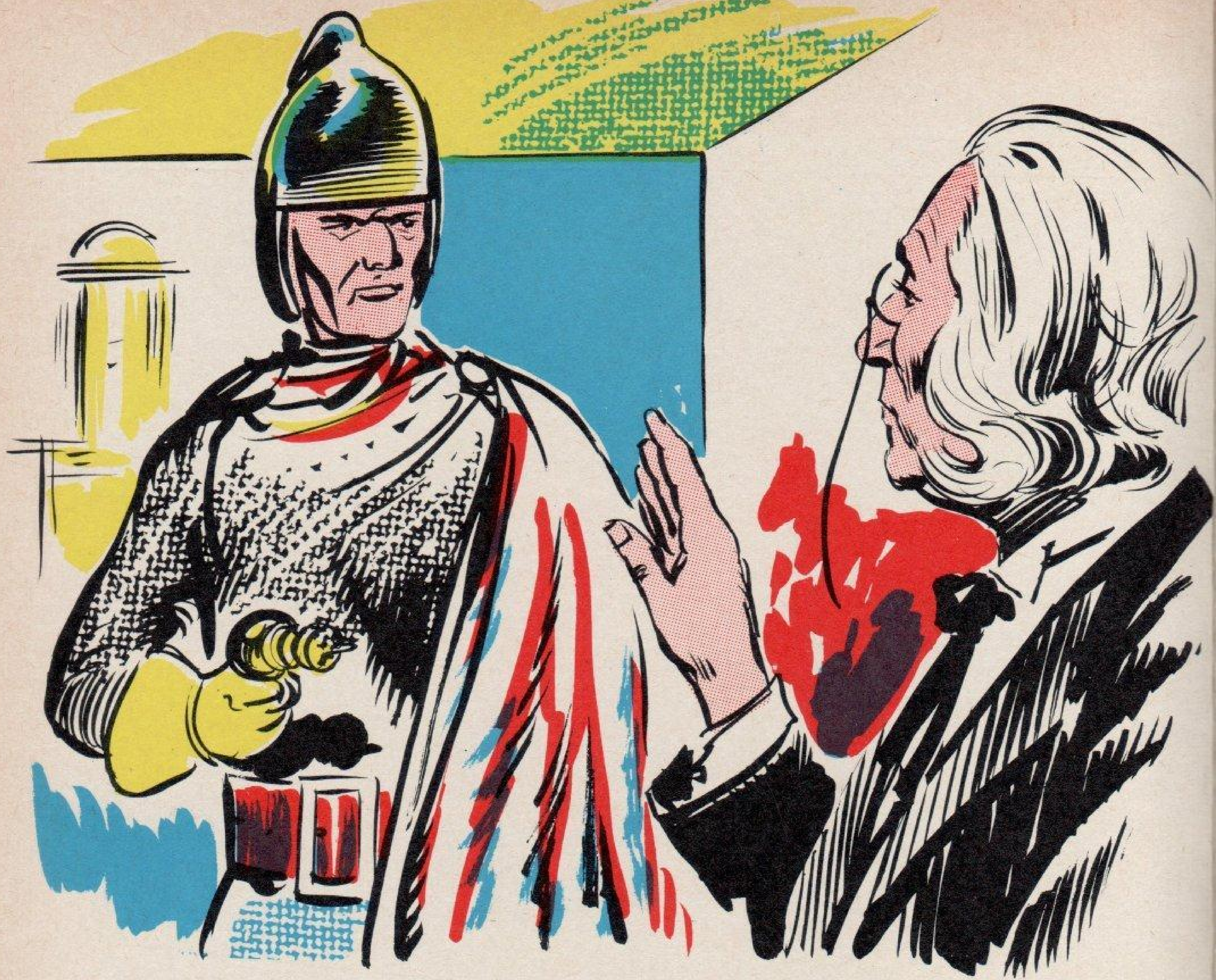


mused. "They claim to know the purposes of the machines our masters but I have long thought that their life is much like ours save that they have more of the luxuries the machines make for them. They lord it over us, they have weapons, which we are not permitted to have. There are legends of wars between them and our people long ago but of that we know little. I have a plan. Before they come, you must show us what your box will do. I have had a vague dream during the night. If your machine is so marvellous, why should we not, at least some of us, travel to these far distant places to escape from here, or else . . . but the thing escapes me . . . it is that of which you spoke about travelling in time, backwards and forwards . . . I cannot. . . ."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Dr Who impatiently. This was no time to tell this ignorant savage that his vague dreams were true. A sudden new idea came into his mind. From what Drako had told him, he knew that at some time in the incredibly remote past, men had built these vast machine creations. The centuries and the millions of years had caused the machines to grow into the stature of gods while their human creators had degenerated into mere slaves of the all-powerful machines. Suppose, just suppose, these creatures could be transported backwards in time to a point before the machines had been allowed to dominate the planet. With their foreknowledge they might then destroy what machines there were already, innocent useful machines then before the mysterious thing had happened to them to make them dominant and malevolent. The *Tardis* would hold quite a few of these creatures, he thought. There was the fact that the damage to the vehicle had made it impossible for him to plot a true course through time and the dimensions. There might come a moment when a chance might have to be taken. Well, all his life and all his wanderings had been the taking of chances. And suddenly, he felt a fellow-feeling to these poor semi-humans, slaves of these monstrosities, even spending their lives building more of them right now. He must do something to help them. Something? What should he do?

"Take me to my ship," he said loudly and Drako smiled.

"It is in a safe place," replied the man. "We have removed it from the side of the giant



synthesiser. It is ready for you. We will go now."

"You moved my ship!" Dr Who said horror-stricken. "You may have damaged it for ever. You know nothing about it—you great fool——"

"It is safe," snapped Drako. "We are not fools or simple savages, as you appear to think. Come, we will go to where it lies now."

"Oh, no, you will not, my friend," came a new voice and a face appeared behind that of Drako. Dr Who looked at the face in surprise. It was a dark face, darker than those of his captors. It was a cruel, proud and haughty face. A metal helmet was on the head and the rest of the body was clothed in loose metal-mesh clothing. Drako sprang to his feet and then bowed cringingly.

"You are Drako," said the newcomer superciliously, "head man of this Haven, I believe. I am Beran of the Wise Ones of Haven One. We have come at your request. Is this the wizard? And where might his strange machine be?"

There was a thing in the newcomer's hand that seemed to Dr Who to be very like a weapon, though what its powers might be he could, of course, have no clue. He rose stiffly and, screwing his monocle into his eye, surveyed the man.

"You, of the three eyes," laughed Beran. "You are an odd fellow now. Those ridiculous garments, that glass in your eye. Where is your magic? We no longer believe in such nonsense here in Korad. Now, I have been told many strange and incredible things about this machine —this box—of yours. I will examine it thoroughly and learn any trifling secrets it may hold before we destroy it."

"Destroy it!" shouted Dr Who. "Over my

dead body you will." He broke out in a cold sweat. This arrogant creature, with behind him heaven knew what powers, was a very different kettle of fish from the subservient, humble Drako, still crouched in a menial attitude before Beran.

"Even that, if you insist," laughed Beran cruelly. "Destroy it we must. The Mechanistrians permit no machines not fabricated on their world to exist. That is Prime Law One. Anything we may learn from it we will and then it must be reduced to its atoms."

For a moment, there was a deadly silence in the small metal cubicle. Dr Who stood, scarcely breathing, watching the strange thing in Beran's hand, a smooth metal thing which seemed to radiate pure evil. Drako's eyes were on the face of the newcomer and the humble subservience was fading from those eyes. Dr Who felt he must try and gain time. Some great event, something which might change the course of history on this incredible planet, was taking shape.

"I have had a thought," he said to Beran. "It is that together we might overthrow these machine slave-masters of yours. My machine can help you there——"

Beran frowned blackly at him. "It is worse than even I had heard," he ground out. "Overthrow the machines! Now, stranger, it is obvious that you yourself, as well as your infernal machine, must be reduced to atoms. You have no doubt been listening to this witless fool here, this savage with a savage's legends. He no doubt calls his world Korad but that age has long passed. We call our world Mechanistria. The machines you speak so airily of are *ourselves*, fools. Into each of them was built a human brain. It is the greatest privilege of a living Mechanistrian to be chosen for his brain to be built into a new creation of metal. We thus achieve immortality and we at once acquire all the knowledge of all the machines in Mechanistria. These savages call us the Wise Ones—the words are well-chosen. There will come a time when this world of Mechanistria will conquer the whole universe. The power of our human brains, extended a million fold by the strange and powerful knowledge we are acquiring of the physical universe will make us lords of the universe. We live on this globe surrounded by the mighty brains of our illustrious ancestors, living for ever at the hearts of the wonderful mechanisms they made for themselves."

He ended arrogantly and Dr Who drew in his breath. This was truly a staggerer and all this could not be properly taken in at once. He dully watched Beran walk carelessly to the head of the ladder leading down. They saw over his shoulder down into the great hall.

A mob of the Korads was penned into one corner by a file of the metal-clad Mechanistrians. A voice came to Dr Who's ears. It was the voice of Drako, now no longer humble and diffident. Now it was strong and vibrant. He turned round wonderingly. Drako held the strange weapon in his own hand now and was pressing it against the neck of Beran. The Mechanistrian, from long ages of carelessness with the Korad slaves, had dropped his guard and Drako had moved swiftly.

"Down," he snapped harshly. "We go outside the hall. One move or one word from you, Wise One Beran, and it will be you who is resolved into atoms. Move now, quickly."

Like one in a dream, Dr Who went down the ladder as did the scowling Beran with Drako a close third. At the foot, Drako held the weapon against Beran's back. "Tell them we are going to examine the ship," he hissed. Beran stared at him superciliously and with a look that should have shrivelled him but he shouted out an order to the other Mechanistrians and none came forward.

"What about me?" asked Dr Who indignantly as they shuffled towards the small door leading to the outside.

"I need you, friend," said Drako. "You and your box. Get in."

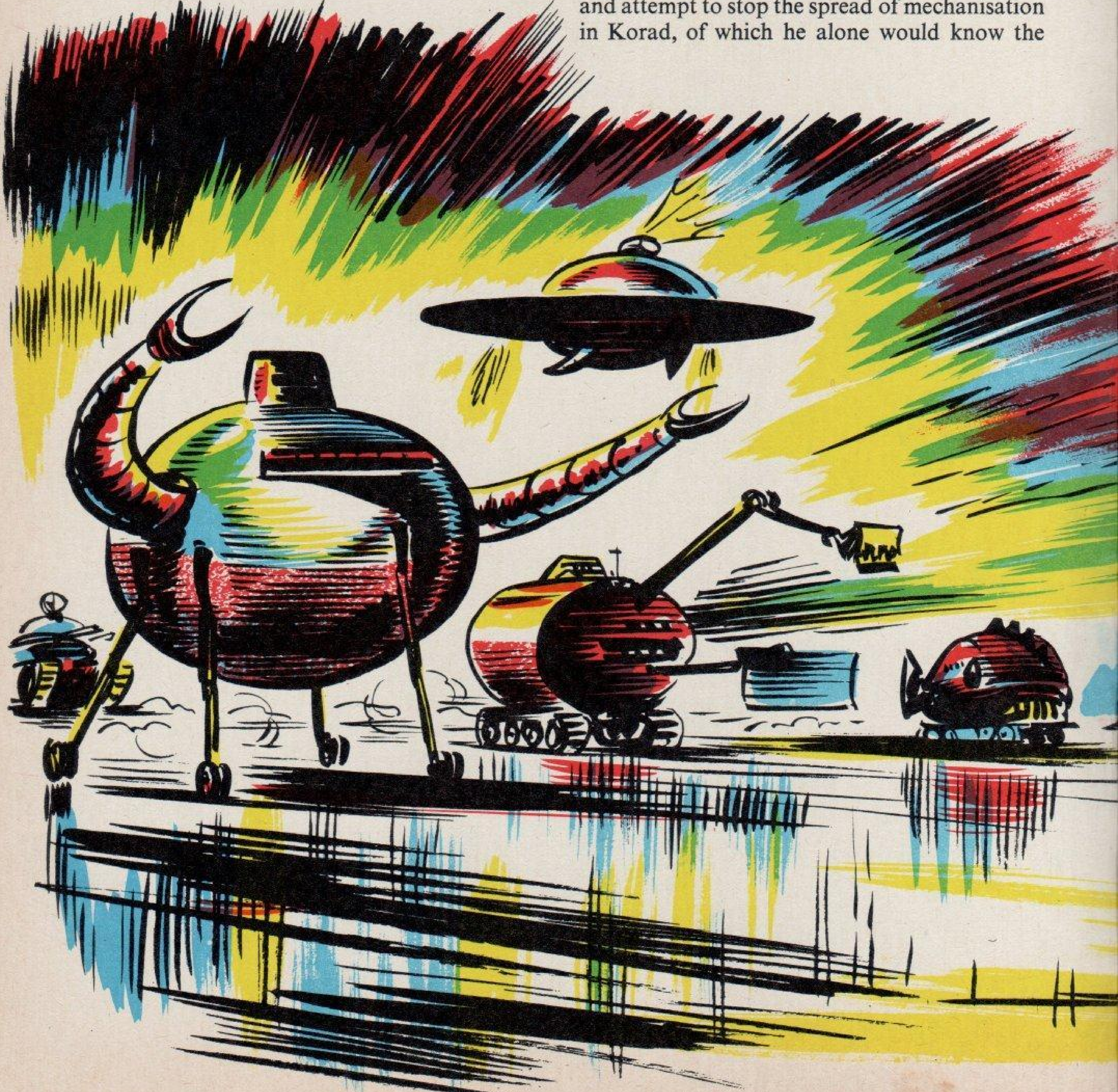
The soarer was a shallow boat-like affair, scarcely more than a platform and it barely held the three of them. Drako pressed some buttons and it rose at once into the air and headed out across the metal plain towards the distance where stood what could only be that vast metal mountain, which had been Dr Who's first sight of this odd world.

Drako looked coldly at Beran. "I cannot kill a fellow man," he said. "You will leap from the soarer now. Leap or I kill you, if I must."

"Poor fool," laughed Beran and he stood up. "You really must try and harden yourselves. You should really kill me, you know." With a loud laugh he leaped from the soarer and plummeted down. Dr Who shuddered as he watched but then as he saw the *Tardis* down there, he forgot everything else.

The ship was lodged in a fold in the shimmering metal plain, and the door still stood open. "We moved it carefully," explained Drako wiping the sweat from his face. "The thing has come quicker than I had thought. I must go alone. Strange man from elsewhere, you must take me in your box to the far distant past of my world. I must go alone where I had hoped to have support and companionship. I will land the soarer close to your ship."

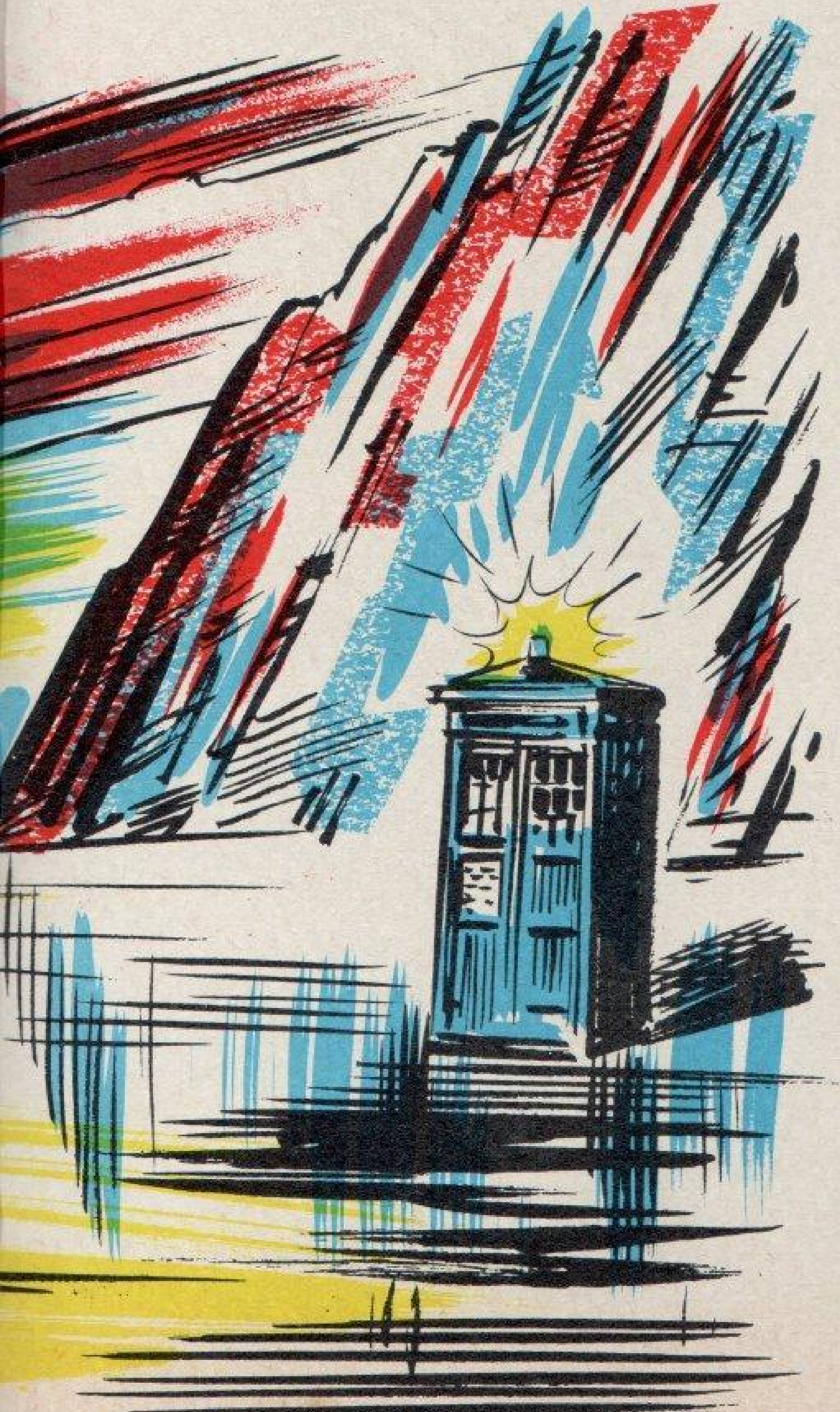
Now it was Dr Who's turn to be threatened by the strange weapon. Drako pressed it into his back as they moved forward across the metal surface. In Dr Who's mind was a maelstrom of fears and emotions. This man he was admitting to the *Tardis* might overpower him once he had mastered only enough of her secrets to control her. He might then kill her owner and thus make himself master of all time and space. Dr Who sweated. What, after all, did he know of this curious creature? Slave and mechanic of the monstrous half-human machines of this weird planet, could he trust him? But then a new thought struck him. The fellow had said he would go to the far distant past of his world and attempt to stop the spread of mechanisation in Korad, of which he alone would know the



end in the monstrous reality of present-day Mechanistria. That such a thought, completely unknown before in his world, should even have come into Drako's mind, seemed to prove to Dr Who that he could be trusted. Anyway, the doctor thought wryly, he did have the weapon, didn't he, and therefore he *must* be trusted.

They stumbled over the smooth plain towards the open door of the *Tardis*. Dr Who stepped inside and Drako, still holding the weapon, hesitated. The glittering interior, so vast compared with the smallness of the box, obviously frightened him. "There is nothing to fear," said Dr Who with a smile. "It is only machinery, you know."

He went to the central control panels and his hands ran over the familiar controls. He watched the great doors as they began to swing shut. His hands faltered as he saw what was coming towards them across the metal plain.



A great horde of mechanical monsters, some on wheels and some on legs and some on both, was attacking them. The Mechanistrians had brought all their forces into operation against them. Dr Who's mind almost reeled as he saw the monstrous and fantastic shapes which had been wrought by these masters of technology, those eerie beings, powered each by an incredible and ancient human brain and spread all over this planet in those mountains of metal, working, working, working, all for their own inscrutable purposes. How little he knew of this world, on which he had spent so little time.

"Don't fear those things," said Drako. "*They* are not Mechanistrian brains. They are mere mechanical handling devices. Close the door."

The nearest was only a hundred feet away when the great doors closed and the doctor's fingers flickered over the controls. "I cannot be sure where or when I will land," he muttered to Drako. "There is some damage in the time-space locator, but I will do my best. One thing I can promise you, Drako, we will certainly land on Korad. We will move, not in space but in time alone. I have set the controls to past time but who knows when we shall land."

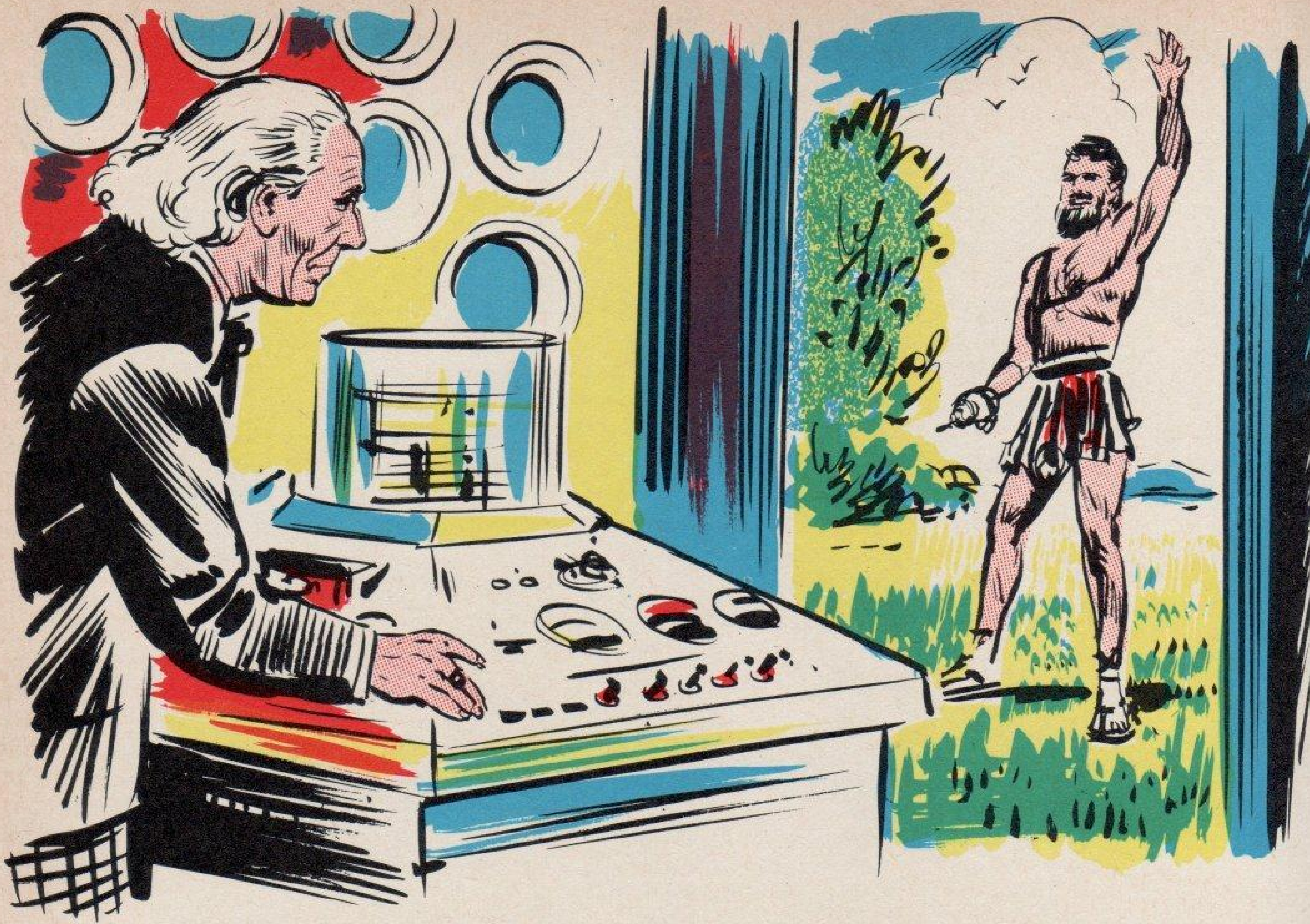
"It is enough," Drako said and he laid down the weapon. "How long will the journey take?"

"How long?" the doctor repeated puzzled, then he smiled. "Oh, I see what you mean. Well, really, no time at all, you know. When one is moving in time, no time at all is consumed in the journey. Can you understand that?"

"No," laughed Drako. "By no stretch of my imagination can I understand that."

"I was afraid of that," sighed the doctor. "Well, I will open the doors now. By my calculations and allowing for the damage to the locator, we should have gone backwards ten million years. One can only trust it has been enough." Drako made no reply, only stared intently at the opening doors. He had scarcely moved a muscle since he had ventured into this strange and, to him, very fantastic ship.

Now he picked up the weapon and attached it to the belt of tools he wore. "This I may need," he said grimly. "I am going out into my world when it was very young. I am going to save it from a future that only now, at such a staggering distance in time, I can at last recognise as horrible and inhuman. You have my thanks,



strange man from out of the universe. I will not betray your trust. If Korad can be saved from growing up as Mechanistria, I will do it."

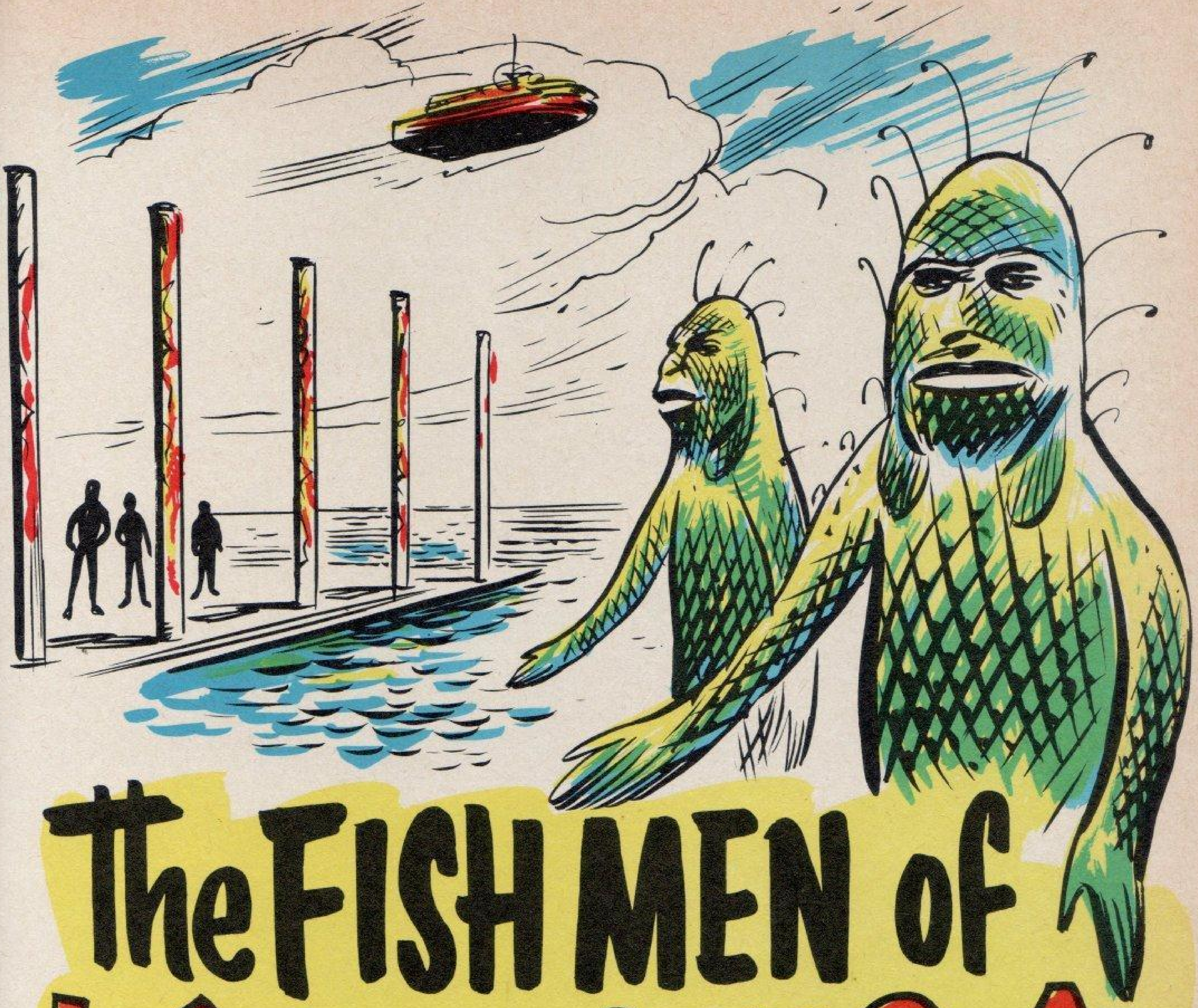
He stepped through the open doors on to green grass. He stared wonderingly at the strange green stuff under his feet and, kneeling, felt it with his hands. Standing, he faced the landscape and the sky. The sky was blue and there were clouds there, clouds which no Korad had ever seen on a planet where there was no water save that which existed far beneath the metal surface. He turned and flung out both hands towards Dr Who still standing by the circular control panels.

"This *is* my Korad, stranger," he shouted. "She is but newly born and lies ready to my hand to shape into whatever form I desire. I will not need this weapon. I will not take such a thing into this new world. Go back where you came from, strange man with three eyes. You have this day saved a world."

The great doors closed and the doctor sighed. The greyness between the dimensions grew in the sight-screens as the *Tardis* slid ghost-like through the dimensions. Had he done right? Was it possible that mere men could outwit the Fate that ruled all things? If Drako was to succeed, where then would be the Mechanistria he had seen and experienced himself? *Could* Drako succeed against the mighty forces of Destiny that shaped the universe?

Dr Who locked the controls and the *Tardis* stayed still in the nothingness outside space-time. He would rest and eat before again he took up his endless wanderings. He glanced round for the weapon he had seen Drako toss back into the ship. It was nowhere to be seen. He laughed grimly to himself. There was his answer. Destiny was not to be thwarted. Then he touched his lips and the smile grew less grim. The weapon, a part of the culture of far-distant Mechanistria—still to be formed if it *was* to be formed—had been snatched out of existence. That might mean only one thing. That Drako had, or would, succeed, and that Mechanistria, with all its inhuman horrors, would never arise.

As he settled himself for sleep a last drowsy smile crept over his lips. Sometimes, the frightening paradoxes were not as frightening as one had first thought.

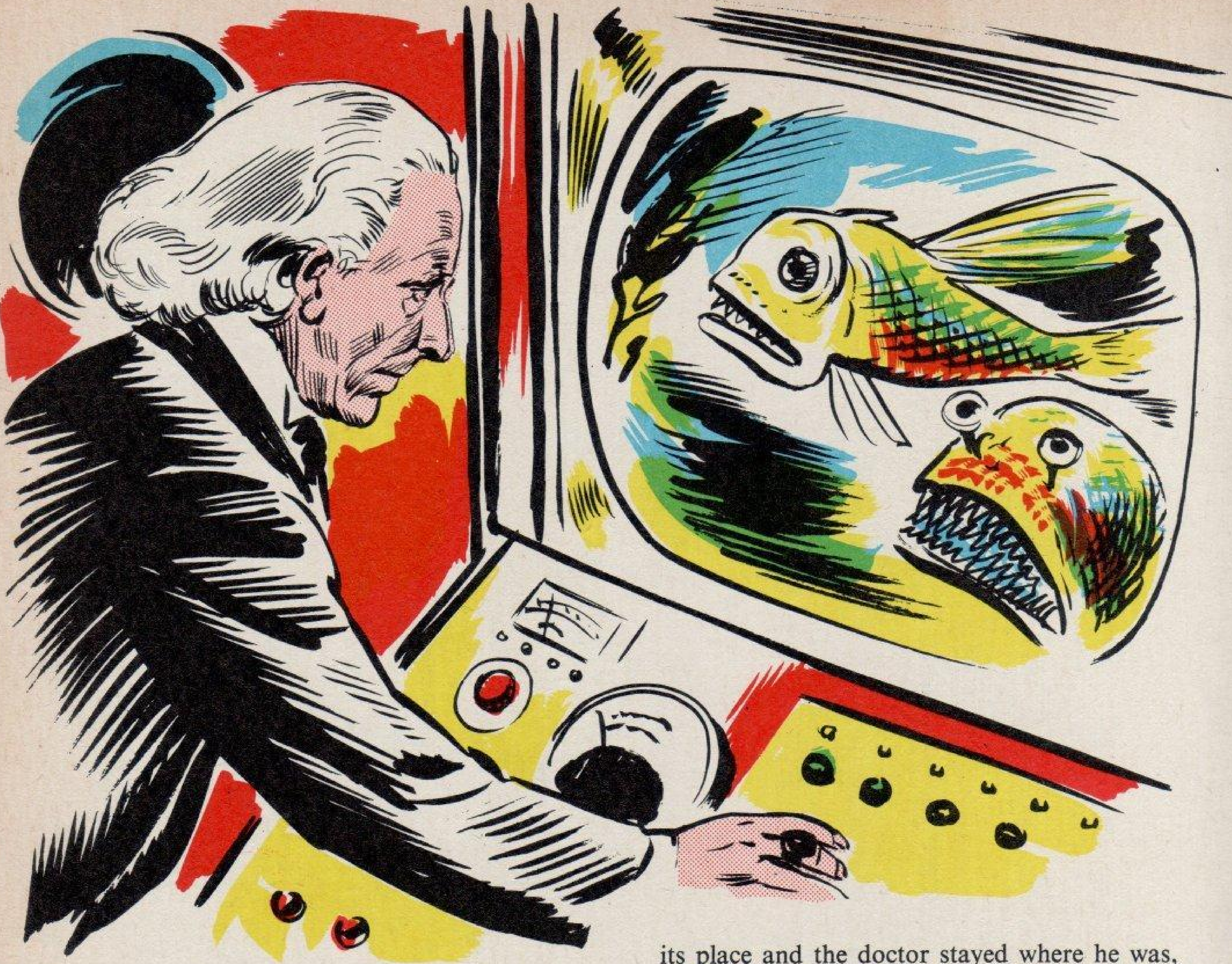


The FISH MEN of KANDALINGA

THE face staring into the outer lens should have been terrifying to Dr Who in the *Tardis* but it was so grotesque that it was comical. While he steadied the image and increased magnification he chuckled to himself.

"My word," he murmured, "our friend outside is definitely in urgent need of some beauty treatment. Now, just where in the universe have I landed? A world that breeds such clowns as this must be a very funny world indeed."

The face was round and fat, like the face of a jolly man. The two eyes were set slightly to each side of the globular head, two great staring glassy eyes. A fringe of what looked like whiskers surrounded the face and as he watched the mouth began to open in a comical grin. And it was then that Dr Who realised that this denizen of an odd world was not by any means comical. For as the huge mouth opened, rows and rows of sharp white needle-like teeth were displayed, and the vast mouth clashed against the outer surface of the *Tardis*.



The space-time ship rocked and rolled from the force of the blow and the doctor clung desperately to the edge of his circular control panel. Small as the *Tardis* was, this creature must be of a truly enormous size if its mouth alone could deal such a blow. The surface outside ran into whorls and sinuous movements and he was forced to the dismal conclusion, which he had first fought against, that his ship had materialised in water.

"Dear, dear," he muttered to himself. "Of course, the thing is mathematically certain that in so many, many strange journeys, landing on so many, many strange worlds, a moment would come when my ship should emerge from intra-dimensional non-space into a planetary environment occupied by water. Now, dear, dear me, this does present many difficulties. I suppose that fellow out there, no matter how big he is, is really nothing but a fish."

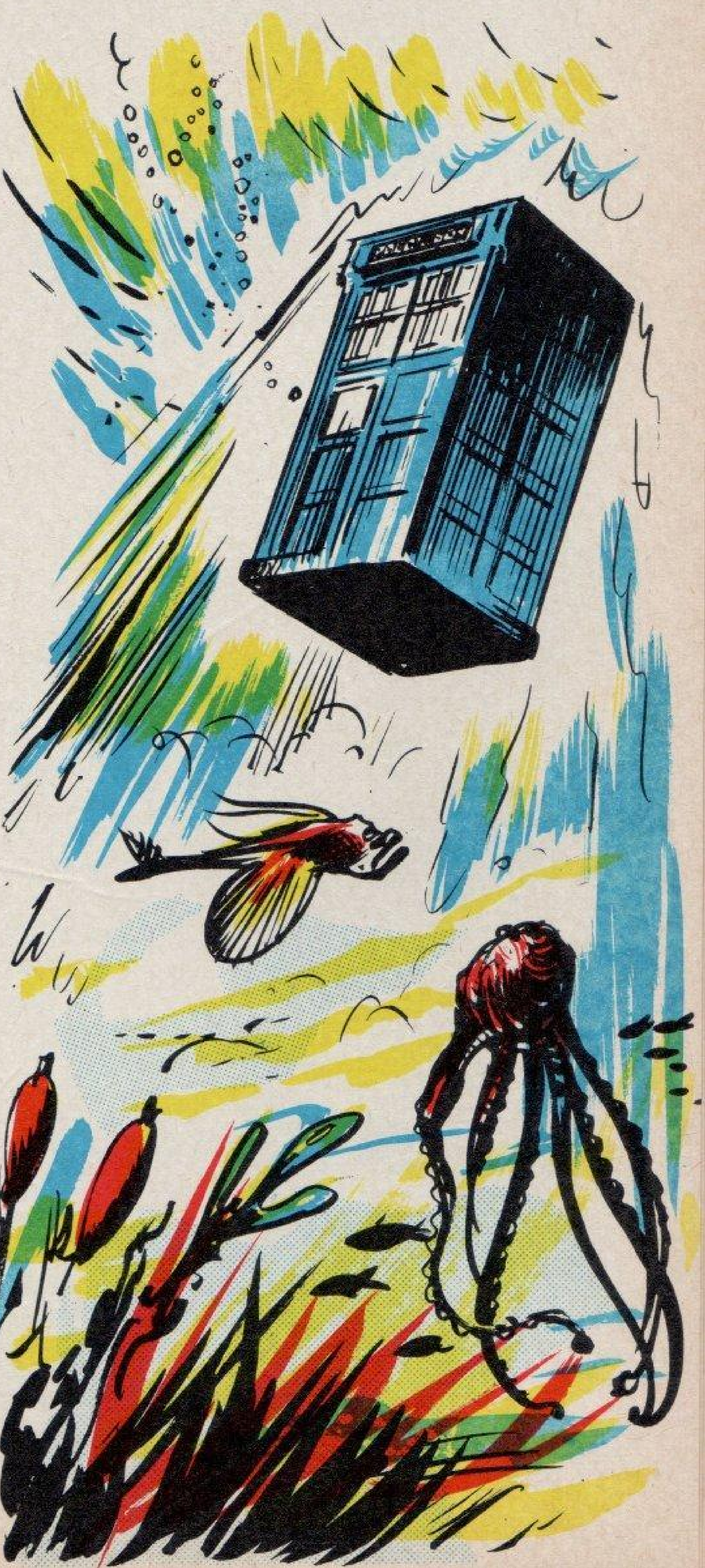
The thing had vanished, but others had taken its place and the doctor stayed where he was, fascinated by the multitude of strange creatures which thronged round his ship. Monstrous they might be but very many of them were so beautiful that he found himself admiring them. Some of them were very fierce indeed and attacked the *Tardis* time and time again. The vehicle moved now only very sluggishly when struck and he felt that maybe she was fast in mud. That would mean the bottom of this water, this sea or ocean, or whatever it was. He should have felt terror and extreme concern at the very dangerous position he was in, in water of unknown depth and proportions. It might not even be water, he thought. He could recall other liquids on other worlds he had seen where there had been seas of acid, seas of liquid gases even. There would have to be a moment when he would start to worry but that moment was not yet. He was too fascinated by the infinite variety and beauty of the scenes before his eyes, eerie and monstrous though they might be.

The colours of the creatures and the trailing plants outside in the liquid included every shade of the spectrum and some which he suspected might even be outside the known spectrum of his own universe. In some of the faces, bestial though they undoubtedly were, there seemed to be a hint of a haunting shadow of humanity. The eyes of the true fishes were glassy and quite without expression; but there were some, which came very close and made no attempt to attack, which held in their depths expressions which he fought desperately in his mind to understand.

Recalled to sanity he ran his fingers over the preliminary buttons which would test the outside environment. If that stuff outside was acid, then this would surely be the shortest visit the *Tardis* had made to any world, for the strange metals out of which she was made were proof against most elements in nature but he did not intend to test whether they were proof against acids. If the liquid outside was not water, then *Tardis* must take off again.

His fears on that score were soon calmed for the liquid outside was quite definitely water, just as much H_2O as any sea or river on Earth. So he did have a breathing space at least; the space-time ship would not be eaten away by acid. The fact that his ship was completely submerged in water did not worry him very much just now. The *Tardis* was quite watertight. What did nag at his mind was the fact that the vessel had no way of movement except in its own quite mysterious motion in space or time. She had no wheels or tractor treads. If he wanted to take the *Tardis* out of this watery grave in which she had materialised, he would have to do it by the only way there was, namely to shift her completely out of this world. Or if he remained in this world, he must shift her in time, either backwards or futurewards. And the doctor was very reluctant to leave this strange world before he knew something about it.

Now his fingers began to play gleefully over the controls. Nothing would be lost by a little experiment. He would put his ship through her paces. A ship which could transport itself instantaneously across millions of miles, a ship which could materialise millions of years in the past or the future, should have little difficulty in travelling a few hundred miles, or a few hundred years past or future. Never before had he ever attempted anything like this but now his mastery over the wonders of his ship was growing and, anyway, he had little choice. There was no way out of the ship into the water and those choice specimens out there were gathering in ever-increasing numbers, many of them looking very fierce indeed. He moved a final lever and the watery scene faded from the sight-screens. A moment later he heaved a sigh



of relief as he saw landscape outside, and not seascape. He pressed the lever which would open the great door. He would never be satisfied until he had stepped out onto the surface of this world that was new to him. His instruments had told him that while the *Tardis* had moved several thousands of miles, she was still in the same time as before.

His vessel rested on a flat surface of what looked like concrete though it was smoother by far and was many coloured. Tall pillars of the same material ran in straight lines parallel with each other for as far as his eyes could see. And they ran along what looked like an ocean which stretched to the horizon itself. He began to walk through the avenues of pillars and in doing so he received the greatest shock he had ever had. Almost falling into one of them, he stared aghast at the sight of the thing that lay in the oblong grave set into the concrete.

It was completely immersed in water and the eyes were closed but it was man-shaped in that it had a head, two arms and two legs. There the resemblance ceased. For the thing was covered with scales, it had gills at each side of its neck and two more at the waist. The lower limbs were webbed and the whole body seemed to be covered with tendrils that floated in the sluggish green-tinted water in which it was immersed. He walked a pace and saw yet another water-filled pit like the first. Then another and yet another. All along the causeway, between the colonnade of pillars there were these shallow tanks and in each of them was one of the peculiar creatures. Hundreds and hundreds of them there were, all with eyes closed and all of them still except for the sluggish movement of the water. He stood erect and stared round him. He could see now that truly he had landed on a causeway. Not more than a few hundred feet wide, it stretched to his left out of sight and to his right out of sight. To either side was what looked like everlasting ocean.

Then he heard the sound. Like a great horn or conch, it sounded from over the sea in a deep, hollow, moaning noise. Three times it was repeated and then silence. Dr Who stared all round him and up into the sky. But he could see nothing. Then from the corner of his eye he saw movement at the edge of the water-pits and, fascinated, he watched the creature climb up on to the smooth, varicoloured pavement.

It stood to its full height, dripping water, and it was not above four feet in height. The scales glistened in the light of a small sun just rising from the horizon. The tendrils lay like wet hair against the silvery scales but Dr Who noted that, as they dried, they began to wave in a warm breeze that had sprung up. Warily, he moved away and, crouching down, regained the *Tardis*. He did not enter, but closed the great door, put the electronic key round his neck on a chain and hid behind the vessel. What he saw as he hid there made his eyes bulge.

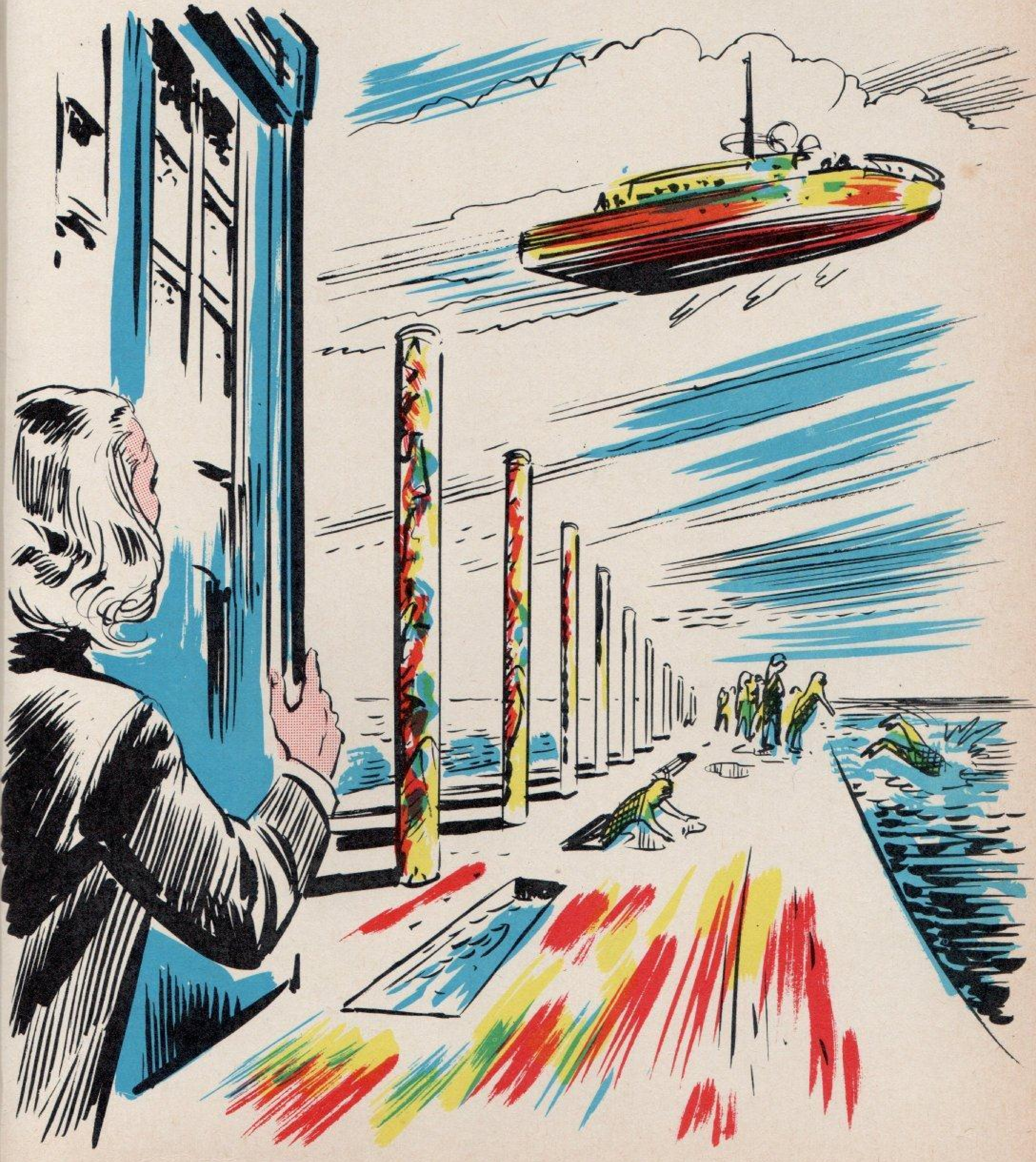
From pit after pit the creatures crawled and shook themselves like dogs shaking the water from themselves. They made no sound, there was no noise coming from their wide mouths and, although many of them were facing the *Tardis* and must have seen it, it seemed to excite no attention: it was as though there was nothing there. Then the great horn sounded again across the water and the ship came.

It was big, by any standards, and was shaped like a vast barge. Of its method of propulsion there was no sign, and Dr Who was forced to the strange conclusion that the ship must fly and rise and fall by anti-gravity. This was a principle he had never encountered before on any world he had visited although obviously the thing must have been used when the *Tardis* was originally fabricated.

The vast ship settled on the water as gently as a feather and Dr Who saw an immediate reaction among the creatures from the water-pits. Just like soldiers they began to form up into lines, facing one side of the causeway. They stood perfectly still except for the waving of their drying tendrils and they appeared to be waiting for a signal. If signal there was, it made no sound to the listener's ears yet, suddenly, he was startled as the front rank of the creatures dived head first into the sea, to be followed by the second rank and then the third and so on. Inside a moment, the whole crowd had vanished and Dr Who was alone.

His attention had been taken by the beings on the barge itself. They were totally black: heads, bodies, faces and limbs. There was a deep nagging in his mind about them. Of course they were too far away for him to see any detail, but even so his mind was troubled. These black beings had some special sort of significance, he knew that within himself.

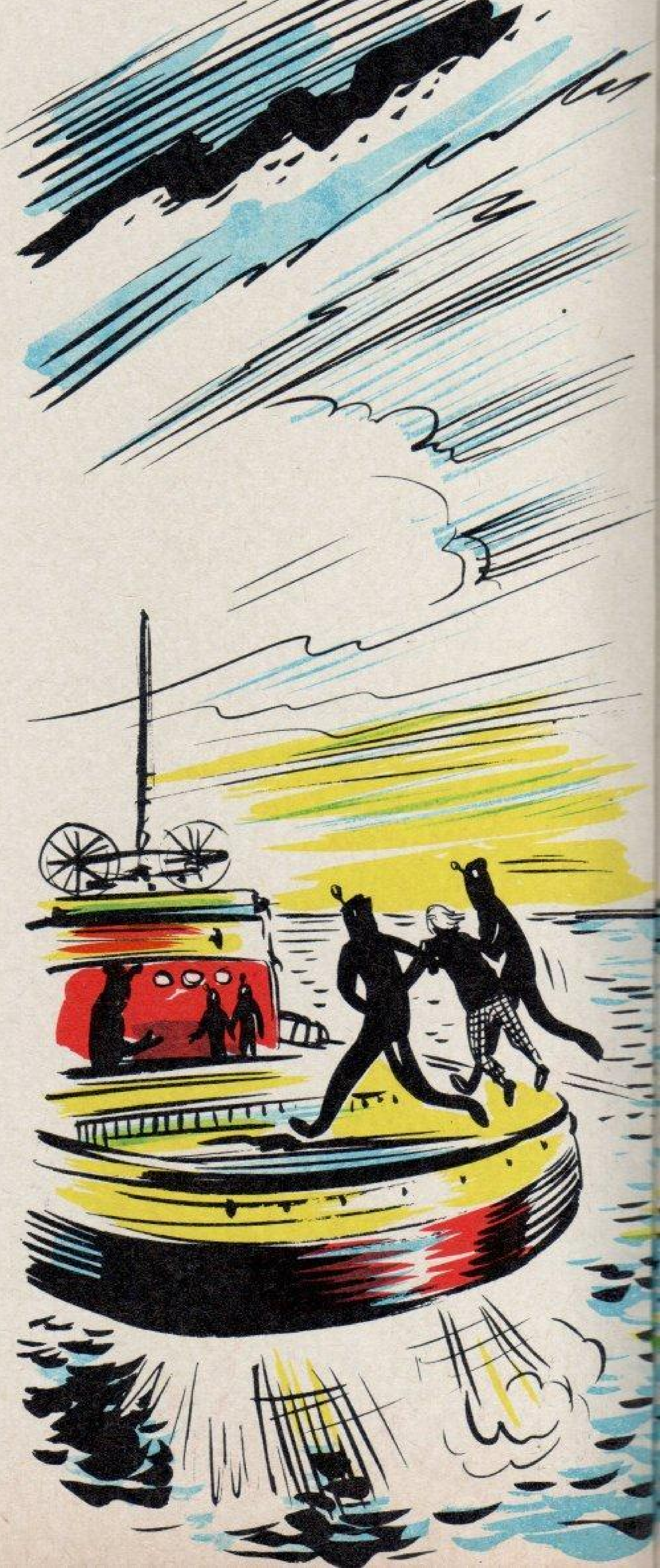
When all the creatures had vanished beneath the waves the ship rose and, travelling only a few feet above the water, proceeded slowly across the wide expanse, travelling at right angles to the causeway. Dr Who, watching, could see beneath it a great wash of white foam and something told him that the great throng of creatures from the water-pits were swimming not far below the surface, just behind the barge. It was leading them somewhere Dr Who realised as he stood there, alone now, staring out to sea.



Suddenly it felt cold. Walking across the coloured pavements he looked into several of the pits, all empty now. A feeling of loneliness swept over him like a sudden cold gripping his vitals. He was used enough to being alone, he told himself, but after that great throng of creatures had gone, he felt more alone than he had ever been before. The causeway stretched endlessly in either direction, with the double line of columns dwindling to vanishing point at either end. Where did it lead to? He could not walk to the end of it in either direction. It must stretch for hundreds of miles. And it had been *built*! That was obvious to him now. This thing had been built on pilings driven into the bottom of the no doubt shallow sea. Who had built it, and for what purpose?

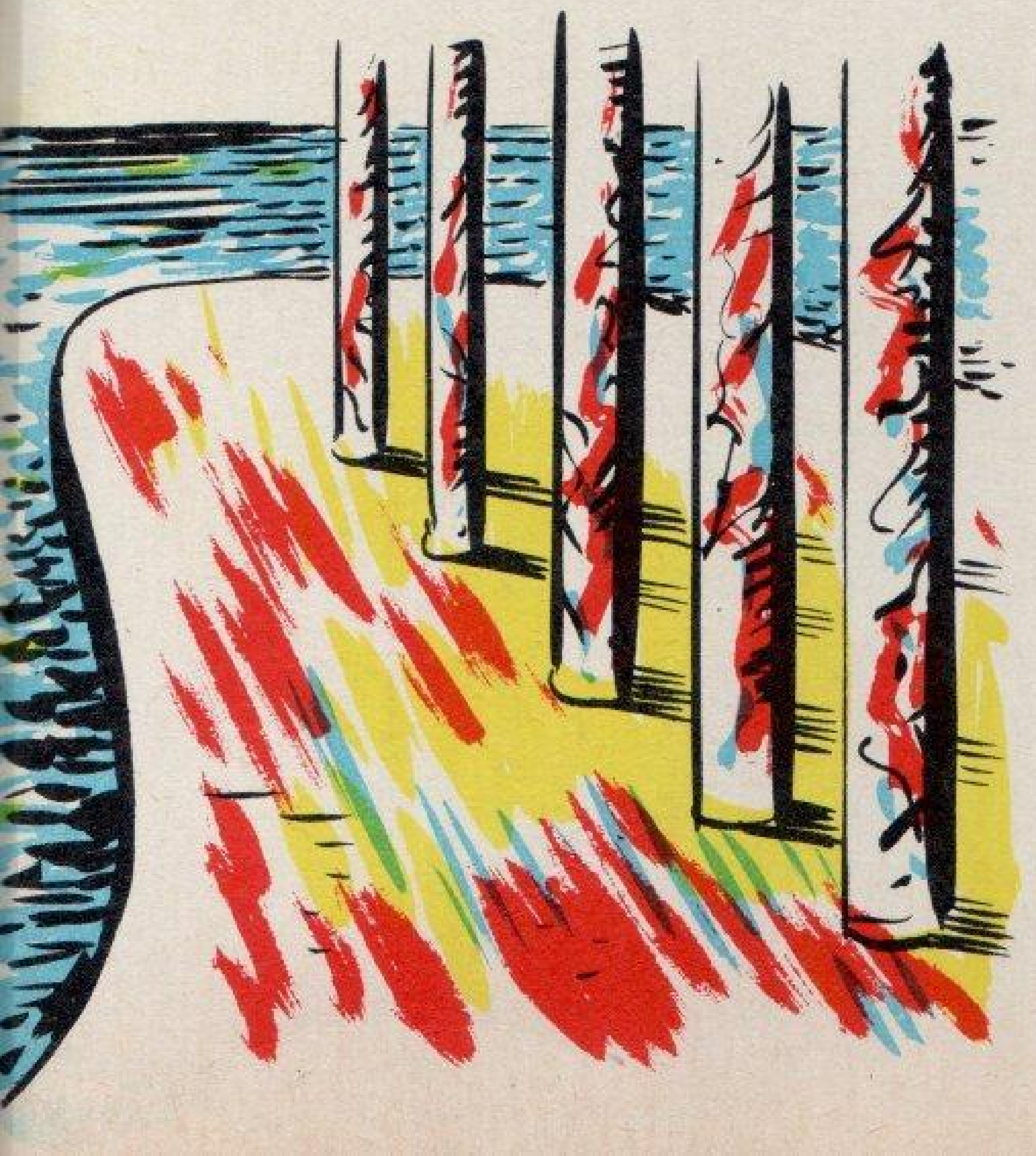
Morosely he retreated to his ship and going inside closed the great door. His forward sight-screen was set to that portion of the causeway upon which he had walked and after he had eaten and rested, he set himself to watch. The small sun climbed up into the sky until it was at the zenith. Its light was quite pale but now, at what would be midday, he became conscious of a new and more brilliant light shining through a dense cloud-envelope. This planet must have two suns! One a small one, the light of which though appearing pale was in reality so brilliant that it could penetrate through dense clouds. Further away would be a giant sun, of much greater power but at such a distance that its greater light did not penetrate the clouds. It would be like that on Venus, in the Earth system, he reflected. Could this planet be almost entirely covered with water?

The second sun rose into the cloudy sky and was well past its zenith when the first sun had sunk beneath the far horizon. Now once again, he heard the great conch or horn. It moaned across the empty sea like some lonely sea-monster keening out its sorrows across the ocean. And the barge came back. With no sound, no smoke, it glided across the sea and hovered close to the edge of the causeway. Immediately there was a flurry in the water all along the causeway and the strange creatures he had seen dive in that morning, now began climbing back up. This time they did not shake themselves but each sought one of the pits in the pavement and slid into the water. All along the causeway, they were doing this and the glow from the clouds was nearly darkening when they had all vanished and the causeway was just as it had been when the *Tardis* had first landed. He dragged his attention from the now-empty causeway and stared out to the barge. It was taking off again after hovering, and now Dr Who was able to see more clearly what or who these mysterious black beings were. His heart misgave him as he recognised them. It had been a long



time, but not to him, since he had first seen these creatures. That had been on Marinus and millions of years either in the past or the future, he had never then found out. But he could not be mistaken. There was the completely enveloping black outline of the creatures, that odd thing protruding from their heads at the front and the two horns, almost like ears at each side of the head to the back. The crew of the flying barge belonged to that race dreaded above all else on Marinus, the mysterious race known as the Voord!

Dr Who knew little about these mysterious beings; all his dealings had been with Arbitan, the leader of the human race on Marinus which, on the occasion of the doctor's visit, had been fighting the Voord for mastery of the planet. Now, if this world which he had now entered was not Marinus, what were they doing here? His curiosity got the better of his good sense and he opened the great door again. Standing near the edge of the causeway he stared out towards the Voord barge. He saw it hovering then settle again a few feet from the surface. Like one in a dream he watched it approach and so fascinated was he by his curiosity that he did not notice how far he had walked from his ship. The barge had appeared to be moving slowly but now, to his horror, it shot like an arrow towards the causeway. In a blur it moved and then stopped. It was now between himself and his ship. His curiosity had indeed been his undoing. Four black figures leaped down from the ship and approached him. There was nothing to be gained by struggling. They took hold of him, not roughly, and led him to the ship. Two of them holding him, they leaped on board as the barge glided away from the causeway. It rose into the air and like an arrow, sped fast across the waste of water into the eye of the setting sun. Dr Who found himself standing facing a group of the black Voord, all standing perfectly motionless: faceless, black and unspeaking. With what dignity he could find, he smoothed down his clothing, thrust back his white hair and screwed his monocle into his eye.



"And what, may I ask," he said haughtily, "is the meaning of this? Am I to regard myself as a prisoner?"

Although he did not intend to give his captors the satisfaction of knowing it, his mind was working furiously on the problem of his ship, left there high and dry on the causeway, amidst those water-pits filled with the small sea-monsters. True, they had made no moves to come near him or his ship when he had first landed. In fact they had appeared not even to see it at all. Oddly enough, neither had the Voord, he told himself. It was all very odd, very strange indeed.

"Well, sir," he said severely, addressing the foremost black being on the barge deck. Across his mind floated a succession of dim pictures coming from he knew not where . . . and then he heard a sound. It was hardly a voice, more like a sigh and it came from the creature before him. It was like a voice, yet not like a voice. The words seemed to come to him from far off, as though uttered by a creature quite unused to speech.

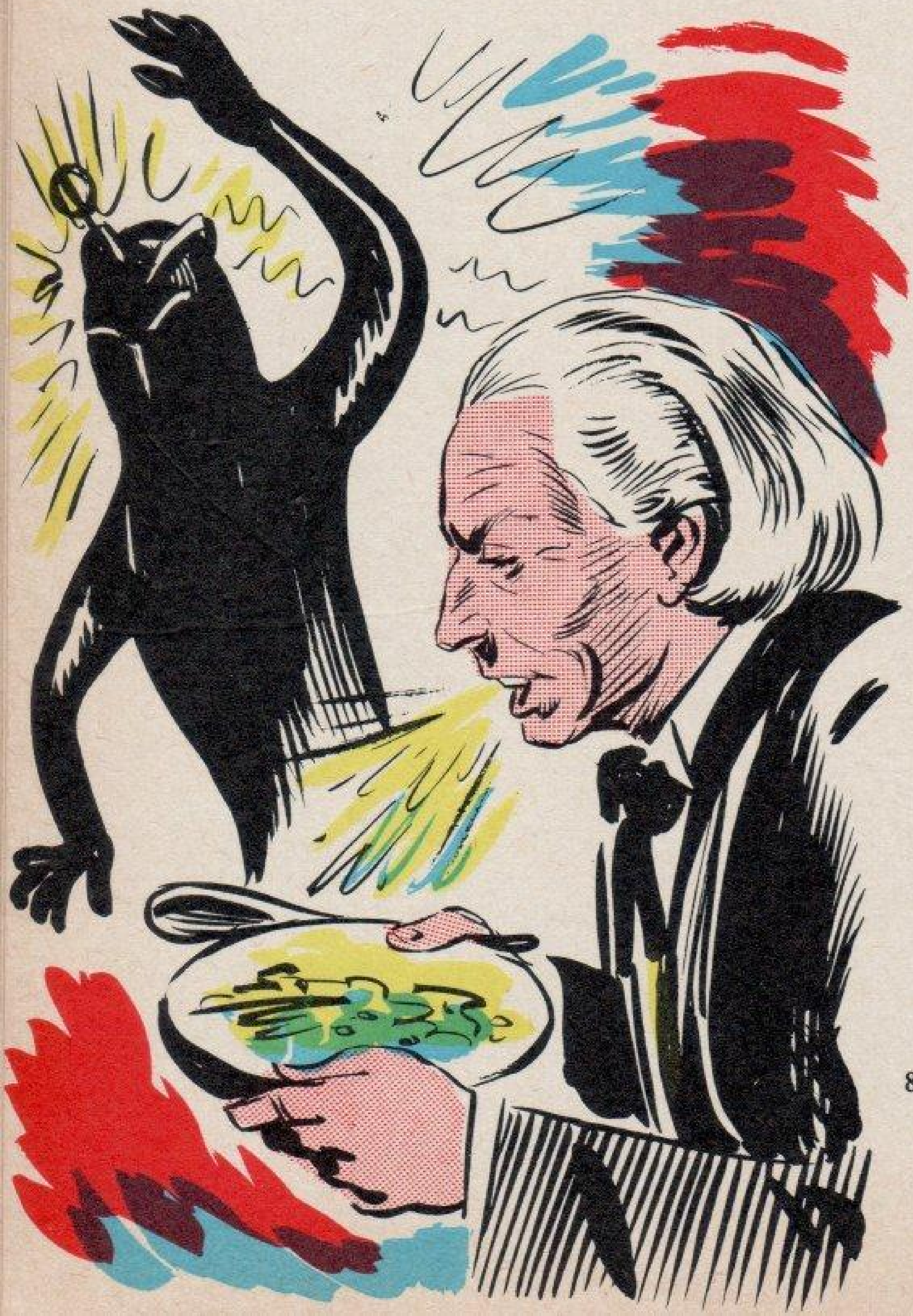
"Who are you, strange monster, and where have you come from?" the voice said. "You are not native to this world. How did you come? We saw no ship and never have we seen a creature like you before. There were legends on our old home-world of creatures like you. They came to that world where we lived and, the legend says, they helped the Arbitans to overpower our race so that they were able to cast us out of Marinus. Speak. Who or what are you, and whence came you?"

Instantly, the doctor knew that there was danger here from the Voord. He called the dominant race on Marinus the Arbitans. It must be now many millions of years since his last visit to that planet, when he had aided the leader Arbitan to overthrow the evil Voord.

These Voord called the triumphant race of their world the Arbitans. No doubt with the passing of the centuries the whole race had assumed the name of their great dead leader. If these Voord ever became convinced that he was in reality the very being who had engineered their downfall then they would give him short shrift. But he felt reasonably certain they would not know this. The creature had whispered of legends. Many, many years had passed and none of these Voord, living now, would ever dream of connecting him with the mysterious creature who had visited their old planet. On that last visit the Voord had never seen his *Tardis* and it looked now as though they did not even recognise it as a vehicle. He tried a confident laugh.

"I know nothing of what you speak. I am a visitor from another world and I am puzzled by this planet. What is its name and are you the ruling race here? Who are those creatures in the water-pits?"

"You ask many questions for one who is in our power," came the reply and now into the voice had come an edge, a hint of savagery. The black being moved an arm and two of the Voord seized the captive and threw him down on the deck. Protesting furiously, Dr Who found himself being chained to a mast. He shouted and raved and tore at the chains but none of the Voord seemed even to hear him and gradually he calmed down and began to examine his surroundings. Oddly enough, he finally decided that perhaps the creatures did not really hear him. He could see no evidence that any of them spoke to each other; there was no sound from any of them as they went about their duties.



The barge sped on across the sea and presently a flat plate of what looked like food was put before the doctor. Critically he examined it and turned up his nose. An hour later he touched it and found the mass was slimy and smelt like fish. Obvious enough on a world like this. But it was raw! Did they expect him to eat this?

Another hour and after seeing many of the Voord eating what looked like the same kind of food, he conquered his abhorrence and, picking it up, tried to force some of the fishy, flesh-like food into his starving mouth. The reality was much worse than the anticipation. He gagged and almost vomited as the flesh, cold and slimy, uncooked and fishy, refused to stay in his mouth. He gave a loud angry yell and he was very surprised at the reaction.

Those Voord who happened to be close to him cringed away from him as though in great pain. All the black beings on the barge deck looked at him and the one who had spoken to him came over.

"You will not eat," came the soft voice. "If you will not eat this flesh you will starve unless you can live on plankton, which I doubt."

"This stuff will make me sick," said the doctor firmly. The Voord flinched a little and Dr Who searching that black mask-like head, could see no evidence of eyes or nose or ears. Yet the creature obviously spoke and heard, saw and smelled.

"We are nearing home," said the low voice. "Have patience, we will see what is to be done for you on our island. And also, you must speak much lower than you do. Your normal loud harsh noises are able to do much harm to the sensitive structure of my people."

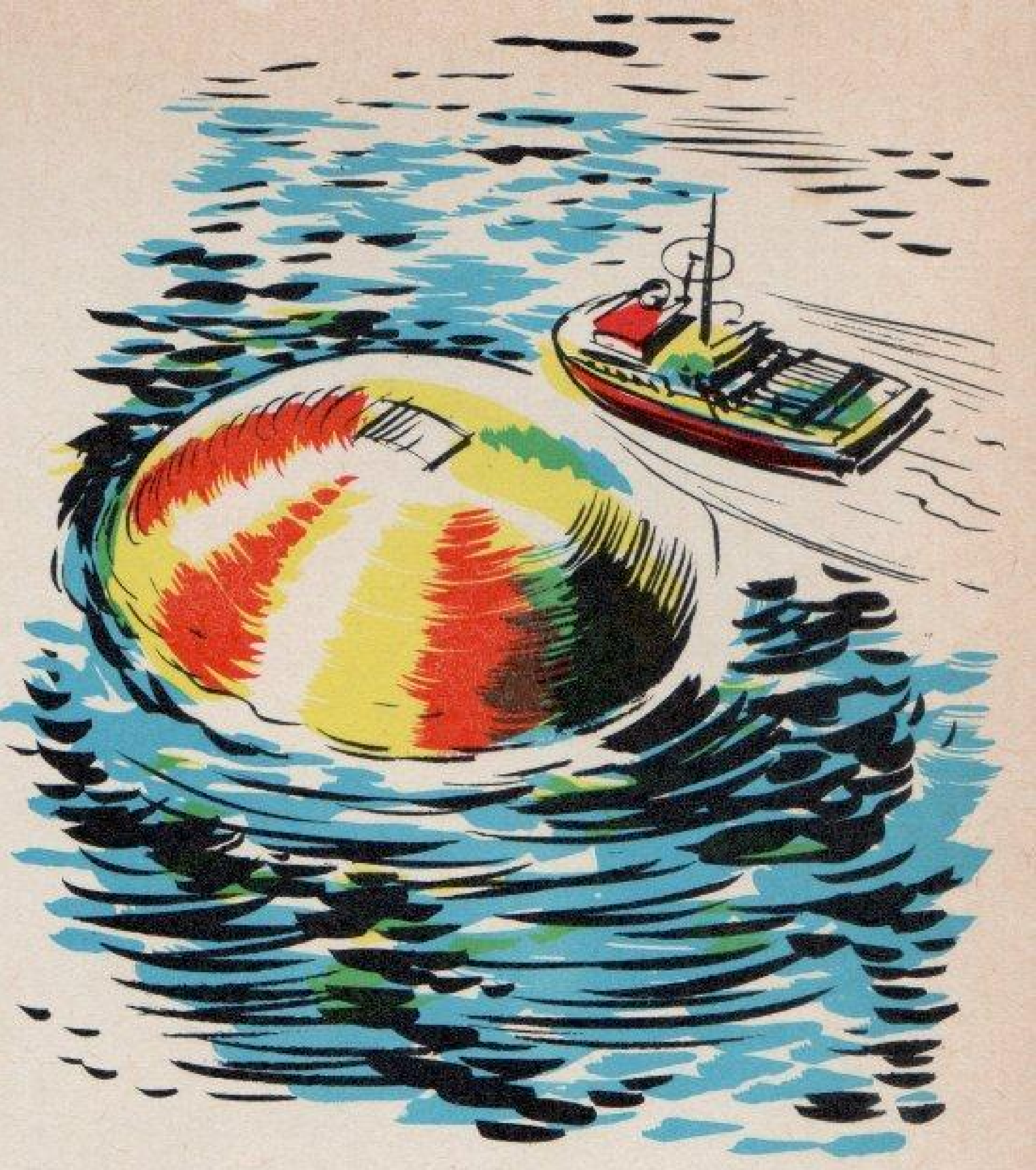
Dr Who digested all this and decided he must remember that bit about the noise—it might come in very useful later on. These beings must have something like the radar-hearing of bats on Earth. They did not speak, though this one could. But all could hear. Now that he was closer to them he could observe better the strange organs on their heads. The one in front like a circle, was divided, and there were two loops at each side of the head at the back. These people must be telepathic! It was the only solution to the puzzle. That odd circular organ was the transmitter of the thought-speech by which they communicated with each other. Following on with this thought the doctor guessed that it was also the way by which they *spoke* to the strange creatures in the water-pits.

The barge had by now landed on what looked like an island. It was obviously artificial, appearing like a round dome built on the bottom of the sea, its peak being the island. The low voice came into his mind and in it was a sharp bitterness. "We are home," it said. "This is our home, our only home on this inhospitable planet."

The whole thing was so odd to the doctor that he made no reply but waited. He was unchained and two of the black beings hustled him ashore. There were no buildings on the artificial island and he deduced that these weird creatures must live underground. This was soon proved true for he was taken to a flight of steps which led down into the bowels of the island. There were lights here and there, pale lights which he suspected would be phosphorescence rather than mechanical or electrical. The smell was overpowering and he almost choked as the fishy smell came to him with full force.

He was hustled along a passage and passed several open doors into rooms with lights. From these rooms the fishy smell came with added pungence and he caught glimpses of what looked like sides of meat hanging on railings while Voords worked amongst them. He was hurried along so fast that he could make out few details but a horrible suspicion was born in his mind at sight of those hanging slabs of 'meat'.

Then he was in a room alone with the Voord who had spoken to him on the barge deck. The room was like a concrete bunker with no furniture. Dr Who shivered as he stood there with the odd black creature. Roughly man-shaped as the being was, he seemed to be as far from humanity as any race he had ever encountered. How did they live down here in these concrete warrens? What sort of civilisation did they have? There seemed to be no points of contact between himself and them.



"You say you are from another world," came the low sighing voice. "So, strange creature, are we. We are not native to Kandalinga. We came through space to this world hoping to find a refuge here after we had been cast out from our native world."

"Your native world was named—what?" asked the doctor.

"We called it Marinus," was the reply. "The Arbitans fought us for the mastery of Marinus and they defeated us. A few hundred of us, the survivors, they put aboard a space-ship and we came here. There is no land whatsoever on this world, stranger, and we landed on the water. By titanic efforts we converted the wrecked space-ship into our barge and with this as our only weapon we set out to make of Kandalinga a world fit for us to inhabit."

Dr Who stared at the creature thunderstruck. A world entirely of water and a few hundreds of these beings had embarked on the impossible project of *manufacturing* solid land on which they could live. Then, suddenly, he remembered the creatures in the water-pits. Those beings were the slaves of these black monsters. He had seen them called from their water-beds and guided through the water to some unknown destination. For an instant, the doctor had a glimpse of thousands of the fish-beings engaged below ground, in some mysterious process by which the waters could be held back and dry land emerge. Or else, some gigantic process of actually building, from artificial materials, the pilings on which habitable land might be fabricated, such as the giant causeway on which he had landed, and this circular island dome. But here his mind boggled. He was thinking in Earth terms. He was thinking of the processes that were familiar in his own home-world. It would be, it must be very different here on this odd world and very probably he would never gain any clues as to how these weird races lived and thought and acted.

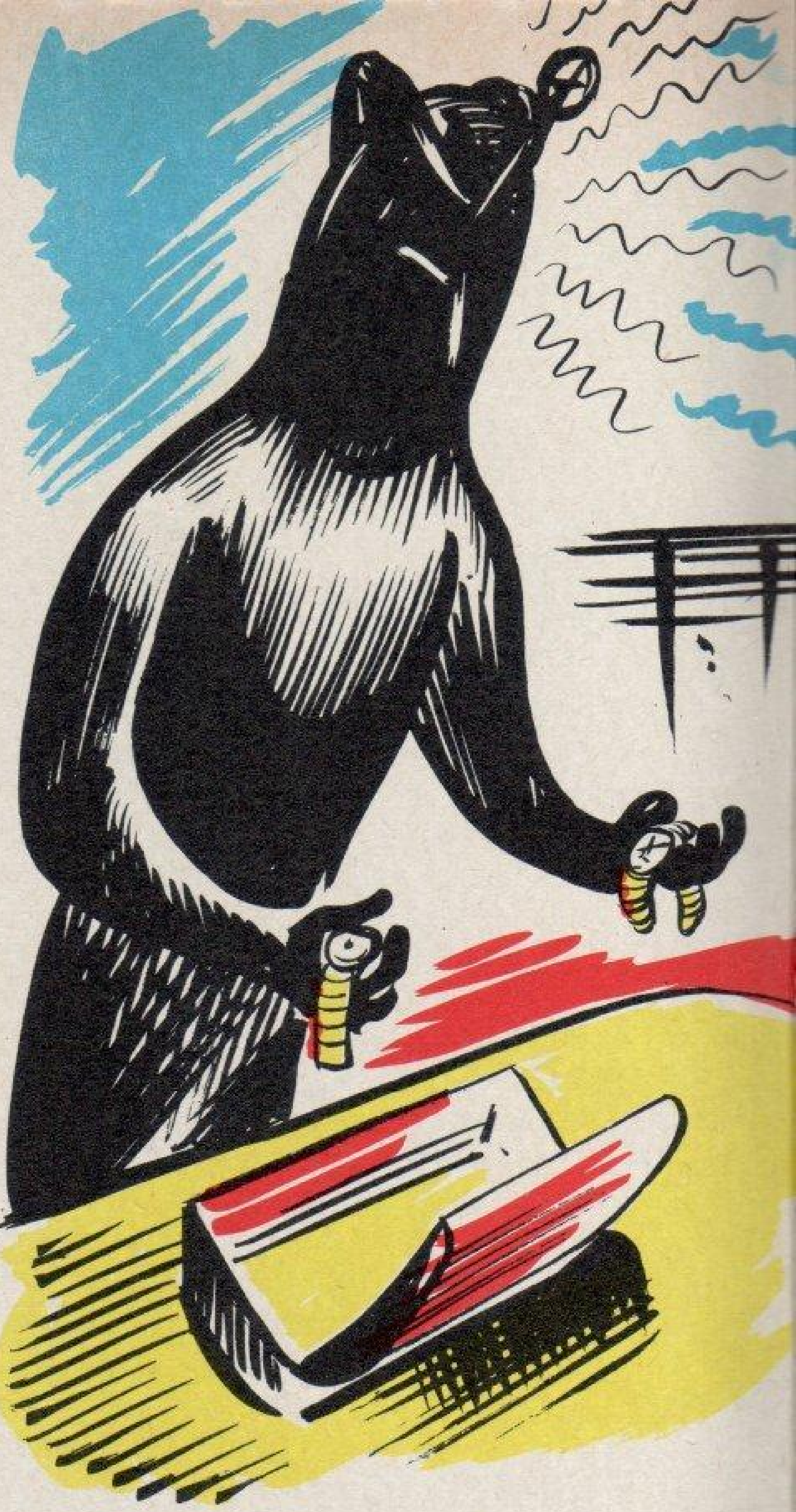
"The creatures in the water-pits on the causeway where you found me," he said. "Who are they and what sort of a life do they lead?"

The voice spoke softly. "They are the amphibian creatures we found to be the dominant species here. They can live out of the water but must spend some time each day in water. They are our slaves. We will use them to make ourselves a home on this world, a home where we can grow our natural food. Then, when we have completed our greatest task, and their usefulness to us is ended, we will destroy them, every one. We will populate this world with our own race. Then, at some time in the future, we will cross space again and will take our revenge on the wicked Arbitans who threw us out."

Dr Who brooded a long time over the softly spoken words. They told him many things. His stomach heaved again at thought of the revolting food they had expected him to eat. He recalled the lighted room with the hanging slabs of 'meat'. Now he knew what happened to the creatures in the water-pits when they were no longer useful for work.

A second Voord had entered the room and he laid a large metal case on the floor in front of the Voord who was obviously the leader. For a while the leader ignored it and went on talking to his captive.

"Where is your ship, stranger?" the sounds came. "If you have come across space, as we did long ago, there are maybe many things in which you can help us in our enterprise. Your ship must be filled with engines which can help us.

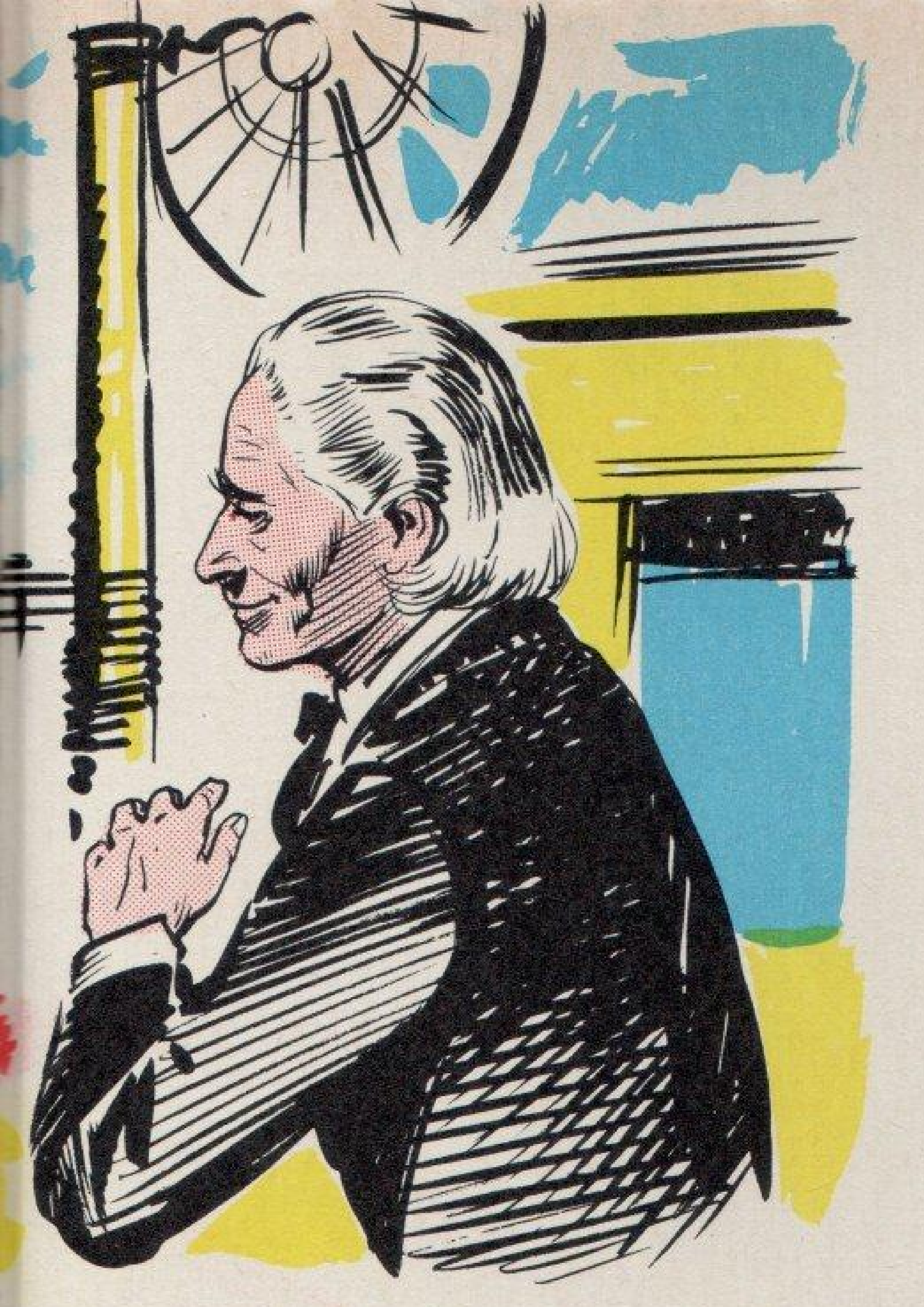


Our plan is a gigantic one and sometimes every so often we quail at the enormity of the task. But it is the survival of the fittest and we can only go on trying."

"Meanwhile enslaving the native race of this world," said the doctor angrily. "Enslaving them and planning their extinction in the future. Meanwhile, eating their flesh. To me that is cannibalism."

The Voord before him stiffened a little. There was no way by which Dr Who could guess at any emotions the creature might have for the black 'face' was quite without features.

"When we came," was the reply, "there was no land and no food for us. We were forced to eat these creatures. They are but fish, anyway, where is your argument? As I said, the fittest and the strongest must survive."



"But there are only a few of you Voord and there must be millions of the fishmen," persisted the doctor. "Do they submit tamely to your atrocities?"

"There have been uprisings," came the low reply. "We have had to wipe out many thousands of them at one time or another. But they breed rapidly and we are never short of slaves or food. Now, enough of this. You will take me to your space-ship at once. We waste time."

He bent down to the case and Dr Who's eyes bulged as he saw what it contained. His mind went back to his first visit to the planet Marinus. There, in nests of red metal, were two of the famous Keys of Marinus. There had been four of them originally, or five, he tried to remember. Their possession and use had been sought by Arbitan and his people in their struggle with the mysterious Voord for possession of a vast complex of machines which would control Marinus. Arbitan had succeeded with Dr Who's help but somehow, later, the Voord had obtained two of the keys and no doubt they were among the sacred relics of the exiled race of the Voord.

He knew he must show no interest in the keys, and with a creature like this Voord it was doubly difficult in that Dr Who had no way of knowing whether the Voord could read *his* mind. Actually he had made up his mind that this was not so, otherwise the being would not have been telling him all it did. If it had been able to read the doctor's mind, it would have known who he was and of his previous intervention in the affairs of the planet Marinus.

Now the Voord had taken two objects out of the case and again Dr Who knew what they were and at sight of them his heart leaped. Here was his way of escape at last. With one of these he would regain his ship and at last shake the dust, or rather the water, of this strange planet Kandalinga from his feet.

"We also brought these with us from our home," came the soft voice inside the doctor's head. Like wrist-watches, the doctor well remembered these marvellous things. Personal travel-machines, he had used these ingenious gadgets when he had worked with Arbitan on Marinus. He saw that the Voord had clasped one of them round his wrist and was holding out the other to the doctor.

"You will take me to where your space-ship is," came the soft words in Dr Who's head. "You will give me all its secrets and you will help me to master this planet."

"Alone?" ejaculated the doctor, hardly able to realise his good luck.

"We go alone," was the reply. "My fellows are mere cattle—they have little stomach for what I am trying to do. Without me, they would succumb to the fishmen. With me at their head and with your ship, I shall be the master of this world. We shall build land and islands and we shall hunt the Kandalingas out of their oceans."

"And suppose I refuse to take you?" the doctor objected craftily, for he knew that he must not seem too eager or willing to do as the other suggested.

"If you refuse," came the sighing whisper, "you will be fed to the monsters which people these world-wide oceans and be sure I shall find your ship, sooner or later, wherever it is on this world."

"It seems I have no choice then," said Dr Who and he clasped the travel-machine to his wrist. "My ship is on the causeway where you found me."

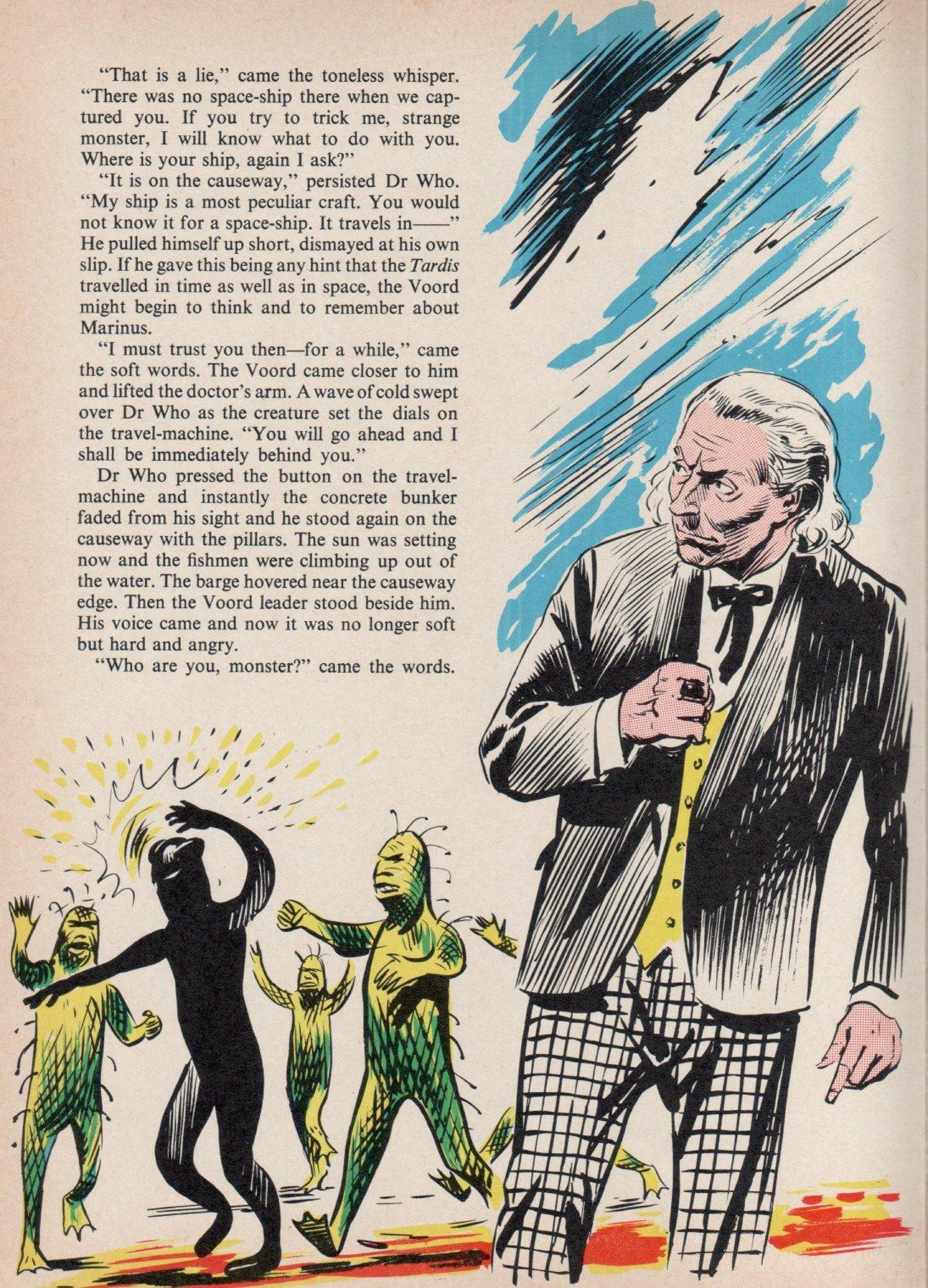
"That is a lie," came the toneless whisper. "There was no space-ship there when we captured you. If you try to trick me, strange monster, I will know what to do with you. Where is your ship, again I ask?"

"It is on the causeway," persisted Dr Who. "My ship is a most peculiar craft. You would not know it for a space-ship. It travels in——" He pulled himself up short, dismayed at his own slip. If he gave this being any hint that the *Tardis* travelled in time as well as in space, the Voord might begin to think and to remember about Marinus.

"I must trust you then—for a while," came the soft words. The Voord came closer to him and lifted the doctor's arm. A wave of cold swept over Dr Who as the creature set the dials on the travel-machine. "You will go ahead and I shall be immediately behind you."

Dr Who pressed the button on the travel-machine and instantly the concrete bunker faded from his sight and he stood again on the causeway with the pillars. The sun was setting now and the fishmen were climbing up out of the water. The barge hovered near the causeway edge. Then the Voord leader stood beside him. His voice came and now it was no longer soft but hard and angry.

"Who are you, monster?" came the words.



"You have knowledge of these travel-machines. I had not told you how to use it and yet you knew. Who are you and where did you come from?"

The fishmen were surrounding them, their tendrils flowing in the wind. The Voord leader ignored them and approached Dr Who menacingly. The doctor knew that he must risk everything on one throw. Everything depended, he felt sure, on that telepathic organ on the Voord's head. He reached up his hands swiftly and seized the thing. The Voord struggled and gave a whimpering sound like that of a kitten. The organ broke off in Dr Who's hands and the fishmen rushed in.

There was a miraculous change in their attitude. No longer were they limp and flaccid, like walking fishes, now they acted like men, like men whose evolutionary progress had been from marine animals and not from mammals, as had happened on Earth. The doctor knew that he had chosen aright and that the planet of Kandalinga belonged to these creatures. They would be telepathic also, taking their orders from the Voord masters by means of the tendrils which were their telepathic organs.

The Voord whom he had deformed was wandering about aimlessly on the causeway, mewing like a cat, apparently all his senses askew with the loss of his telepathic organ. He was soon surrounded by hordes of the fishmen and he vanished from view. The doctor by this time was in the doorway of his vessel and as a horde of the fishmen rushed over he closed the great doors. From the screens he watched them circling round the *Tardis*, touching it, stroking it, very obviously with no idea what it was or where the other of the strange creatures had vanished. Then their attention was diverted elsewhere. Dr Who watching, saw that more and more of them were diving into the water again. The barge of the Voord was still hovering there beside the causeway but now hordes of the fishmen were clambering up on to the decks and it looked very much as though the crew, small enough in number, would be overwhelmed.

Dr Who sighed and going to his circular control panel, he set in motion the electronic processes which would effect his departure. It was rare indeed that he actually interfered very actively in the affairs of any of the strange worlds he had visited but this time he had had no choice. Once before, his intervention had defeated the Voord and now he hoped it would defeat them again in this new world to which they had been exiled and which was obviously not fitted for their existence.

Kandalinga, the world of water, belonged entirely to the strange species of amphibian fishmen whom the invading Voord had enslaved. With their leader gone, it looked as though the surviving Voord would have little chance against the millions of fishmen there must be on the planet. Kept in subjection by the telepathic organ of the dead leader, evidently much more powerful than those of his followers, the natives would very soon overpower their masters and regain control of their own destinies.

As Dr Who pulled down lever after lever, he watched the fishmen covering the flat deck of the Voord barge and knew that he had been right. The Voord had been cruel and emotionless beings, careless of the rights of all other beings to safe existence. They were better out of the way.

As the watery scene outside began to fade from his screens, the doctor sighed heavily. Dearly would he have liked to know more of this strange world. What was the purpose of this odd causeway, for instance, with its marching lines of pillars, travelling in either direction into infinity. What were the mysterious processes, operated by their Kandalinga slaves, whereby the Voord had hoped to make land emerge from the shallow oceans. Probably some sort of electrolysis, he thought to himself, whereby the water would be transformed into its gases of oxygen and hydrogen, thus allowing the dry land to emerge. But that would take centuries, maybe thousands of years, to do, he reflected soberly. The Voord leader had certainly been a most determined fellow. Maybe even he might have been worth knowing. If indeed, there had been any way for human and Voord ever to get to understand each other.

He dogged the final lever and the screen cleared. Well, well, he thought to himself, this surely is a most amazing universe. Now, I wonder what I will find at the end of this journey.

And the *Tardis* vanished from the mysterious causeway, and the breezes blew over the world-wide oceans of the planet Kandalinga, now, he hoped, freed from the grip of the invading Voord.

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